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LETTERS

ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED

TO THE

INHABITANTS OF CORK,

IN DEFENCE OF

REVEALED RELIGION,

OCCASIONED BY THE CIRCULATION

Hinks (T. D.) OF

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MR. PAINE'S

AGE OF REASON,

IN THAT CITY.

Second Edition with Alterations and Additions.

Printed for the Author,

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1796.



P R E F A C E.

IN offering to the Publick at large a second edition of these letters, which were originally intended to answer a mere local purpose, it may be necessary to state my reasons for doing so, especially since answers of merit have been published which might seem to preclude the necessity of any other. The approbation, however, which was conferred upon them by many respectable characters of different religious persuasions, as well as by many of my own friends, the demand for them, when the first edition was entirely sold, and the agreement of the ASSOCIATION FOR PROMOTING RELIGION AND VIRTUE, to take a large number of copies, determined me to reprint them; and I was the more readily induced to do so, because by avoiding topicks of controversy amongst the different sects of Christians, and by giving an abstract of the evidences of Christianity taken from writers of acknowledged merit, I was induced to hope they might be essentially useful to many Christians not sufficiently well informed on the subject.

IN this edition the work has undergone considerable alterations. The second letter of the former edition, *on the nature of testimony*, has been omitted,

partly as being too metaphysical for many readers, and partly on account of the impossibility to do justice to the argument within such narrow bounds. Many digressions have been either omitted, or thrown into the form of notes. The letters on *prophecy* and *the evidence for the Mosaick revelation* have been transposed, and the former considerably enlarged; and some notes, which I esteem valuable ones, and for which I am indebted to the ASSOCIATION already mentioned, have been added, particularly the notes on Tacitus and Josephus in the seventh and eighth letters, and that on the solar system in the twelfth letter.

FOR these valuable communications, as well as for the very liberal conduct of the ASSOCIATION throughout the whole business, I feel myself particularly indebted.* And the part which they have taken has been more pleasing to me, and is more honourable to them, on account of my known difference in religious sentiments from most, if not all the members of that respectable body; a circumstance too which shows that it is possible to answer Mr. Paine *without beating ourselves in fractious disputations about doctrinal points drawn from the bible*, though he seems to think otherwise. Would to God that

* IN acknowledging my obligations to the ASSOCIATION, I conceive myself particularly bound to mention the BISHOP OF CORK, and ALEXANDER KNOX, ESQ; through whom my intercourse with that body commenced and was carried on.

P R E F A C E.

that he and the other enemies of our common principles had less ground for their illiberal reflections, and that the truth of doctrinal opinions were discussed more generally without *wrangling* !

As I have carefully endeavoured to avoid introducing religious controversy, it may be attributed to an improper compliance with the sentiments of others, and as it has been insinuated that I did not believe in what I before defended, I think it necessary to declare, that though the language of others is often made use of, I have not inserted a single sentence which is not perfectly consistent with my own religious opinions. My motive for avoiding such subjects as might render the work less useful, is satisfactory to myself, and will, I trust, be approved by every candid and liberal mind. Whilst I am ready, when occasion requires, to give a reason for the sentiments I have adopted as true, to every man that asketh me, I acknowledge that I feel more zeal for those points in which all Christians are for the most part agreed, as most nearly connected with moral conduct, than for those, however important, respecting which wise and good men have held such different opinions.

It will be observed by those who are conversant with the writings in defence of Christianity, that many of the sentiments, and frequently even the language in the following letters has been borrowed without acknowledgment. My motive for this was
partly

partly to avoid too frequent quotations which might fatigue the reader ; and partly because I conceived it an unnecessary trouble, since should the arguments made use of be deemed sufficiently strong, it is of little consequence on the present occasion from what source they are derived ; and I feel satisfied that none of the respectable authors whose works I have made free with, could they be consulted, would object to such a use for such a purpose.

NOTWITHSTANDING the great additional assistance I have had in revising the present edition, I am sensible that many defects still remain. All the alterations which were proposed to me, have not been made, perhaps through an error of judgment which may render the work less useful ; and others might have occurred, which may not have been communicated from an apprehension of considerably increasing my trouble, or of appearing disposed to find fault. I trust, however, that the deficiencies will not appear great, and that the cause I have undertaken to defend, will not suffer from any errors that I may have committed. At the same time, I earnestly recommend it to every reader, whose doubts may not be removed by this compendium, to consult the works to which I have referred, or others of merit on the same subject, before he decides against a cause for which I am a weak though zealous advocate.

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CORK, FEBRUARY 12, 1796.

T. D. HINCKS.

4-00-58

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L E T T E R S

ADDRESSED TO THE
INHABITANTS OF CORK.

L E T T E R I.

Introduction.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

A WORK has lately been circulated amongst you with much industry, and, if I have been rightly informed, with considerable success, which calls for attention from all who are satisfied of the truth of Revelation, and regard the doctrines of Christianity as closely connected with the present and future happiness of mankind. Had this work been permitted to take the usual course, and only one or two copies of it reached this part of the Kingdom, I should not have thought of troubling you with any remarks, but have trusted to the answers which have been, or will be published in other places, and to the many excellent works which have been written in support of the evidences of Revelation. But when some persons, with a zeal which I cannot think laudable, which perhaps deserves reprehension, have rendered it by their exertions a *local* publication, and have caused its dispersion amongst those, who from their situation in life, are unable of themselves to see the false reasoning it contains, it is incumbent on those, whose education and course of study have led them to investigate the

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subject,

subject, to endeavour to assist their brethren, and prevent them, if possible, from forsaking the clear and pleasant streams of Religion, for the muddy and bitter waters of infidelity. With this view, this and the following Letters are addressed to you.

The publication to which I have alluded, is entitled *The Age of Reason, being an investigation of true and fabulous theology*, and it is written by *Thomas Paine*, a man who has acquired much celebrity by his political writings, and whose name is therefore calculated to promote the circulation of any work. The title which the author has arrogantly, if not insidiously prefixed, intimates his design of showing that Christianity is inconsistent with reason, and that it is to be considered only as a kind of *fabulous theology*.

There are no objections contained in this Pamphlet which have not been already urged, and in the opinion of most who have examined both sides of the question, completely refuted. Like most professors of infidelity* the writer seems to have viewed Revelation only under the mask of prejudice, and to have hastily adopted an opinion which a more full and candid view of the subject might have shown him the impropriety of. Unable to judge the heart of a fellow-creature, I shall not dispute that purity of intention to which Mr. Paine lays claim, nor shall I encourage the supposition that he does not believe what he has published. Like others who have held similar opinions, he may be sincere, and he is certainly more honest than those, who agreeing with him in opinion pretend a zeal for Christianity, and openly deplore that apparent decline, in which they secretly rejoice, and which their own conduct has a tendency to promote. At the same time I must condemn that confidence in his own judgment which has led him to disseminate opinions respecting which he is in a great measure very ill-informed, and which, though they may have been

* Mr. Paine in making some very just remarks on *mental lying*, as he terms it, and the practice of men's subscribing to articles they do not believe, has introduced a new definition of the word infidelity.—*Infidelity*, says he, *does not consist in believing or disbelieving, it consists in a man's professing to believe what he does not believe*. Notwithstanding this assertion, I am still inclined to think the proper meaning of infidelity to be unbelief, or scepticism; I have therefore continued to use it in that sense, as not liable to be misunderstood. What Mr. Paine reprobates may more properly be termed hypocrisy.

been confirmed by long habit, do not seem to have been originally the result of deep and impartial investigation; especially when those opinions, thus arrogantly asserted, have a tendency to weaken, if not destroy the principles of Virtue and Religion so useful to society, and to rob men of their best support under the calamities of life. But, whatever praise or blame attach itself to the conduct of the writer, the work is now in possession of many amongst you, and though I cannot think the arguments contained in it against Religion have much weight, yet there are several circumstances which render it necessary to prepare an antidote for the poison it contains. There is no writer I have ever met with, who possesses the power of rendering what he says plain and striking, in a greater degree than Mr. Paine, so that his arguments are not so much to be dreaded from their own weight, as from the importance which he is thus enabled to give them. Another circumstance which renders his work dangerous, is his want of method, and his constant practice of drawing conclusions which the premises will not warrant, by which means he imposes upon the greater part of his readers, his mode of reasoning, and even his language being often more calculated to deceive than to instruct. The high opinion which many have formed, and probably some amongst you, of his abilities and integrity, also leads them to receive whatever comes from his pen as deserving credit, and blindly to give up their judgments to his guidance. On this account though his work appears to me to contain no argument of much weight against Christianity, it has certainly gained much attention, and has probably done more harm, than any former publication of the same kind, not even excepting Mr. Hume's famous objection to miracles, which has been repeated and conveyed in plainer and more striking language by the author of *The Age of Reason*. There is another circumstance to be observed, which is, that a great part of Mr. Paine's arguments (if arguments they can be called) are directed not so much against the facts recorded in the Gospel history, or against those essential principles which all Christians have agreed in deducing from those facts, as against certain doctrines, which, while maintained by some, have been absolutely rejected by others. Now it must be obvious to every candid person, that the facts which form the foundation of our religion, and the *dissonant doctrines* held by its professors are in their nature distinct from each other,

and that it is very unfair and even absurd to infer the inauthenticity of the *former* from the inconsistency or weakness of the *latter*. In order to make good such an argument, it would be necessary to show that such *doctrines* are inseparably *connected* with the *facts* of Christianity, which however, I cannot find that Mr. Paine has even attempted. I must therefore consider this mode of reasoning as a fallacy of the grossest kind. And yet, absurd and unjustifiable as it is, it is that which has commonly been made use of, by those who pretend to more *reason* and wisdom than the rest of their fellow-creatures. Leaving it, therefore, to the different sects of Christians to support their respective tenets, as their particular belief or inclination may lead them, and desirous of rendering these letters useful to all of you, my fellow-citizens, however various your opinions or modes of worship may be, I shall endeavour to confine myself to what I conceive to be the great leading principles of our religion, and in which we are all agreed,—viz. to prove that the state of mankind was such as to stand in need of a divine revelation ;—that there has been such a revelation ;—that Jesus Christ was a divine teacher ;—and that the truth of his divine mission is confirmed both by miracles and prophecy. In doing this, I do not pretend to remove every difficulty which may occur, as this would extend the work beyond due bounds ; I shall deem it sufficient if I can show, by a plain statement of the *positive* and *direct* evidences of Christianity, that the certainty of its being a divine revelation is sufficiently great to authorise belief, and such as ought to satisfy any reasonable man. Let me, therefore, entreat you to attend to the arguments I shall use with candour, and with a desire to know the truth, and should your minds have been strongly impressed with a disbelief of particular doctrines held by the societies to which you belong, do not therefore reject Religion altogether, but soliciting the aid of God, that he would send the spirit of truth to lead you into all truth, examine the evidence with all the impartiality you are able, and act steadily according to the conviction of your minds. And may God the Almighty Father of us all, give success to my endeavours ; may he render me the humble instrument of confirming such of you as believe, and convincing those who waver ; and may this defence of those great points in which we all agree, conduce to promote and strengthen that love and harmony which should actuate all the Disciples of Christ, and which has too often been lost sight of from a zeal for particular doctrines !

LETTER II.

On the imperfection of Reason.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

MR. PAINE in different parts of his work endeavours to impress upon his readers that there is no occasion for any Revelation, since God speaks to all men by his works, and teaches them their duty; thus adopting the opinion of those Deistical writers who in former days asserted that a divine Revelation was inexpedient, and therefore impossible, "For" that the law of nature is so perfect as to admit of no addition, and the light of nature is so clear and universal, as to "need no assistance." This opinion has been combated very fully both from reason and fact by many able writers, yet our author has not deemed it necessary to notice any of their arguments, which leads me to imagine, that like many others, having examined only one side of the question, or having relied too much on *thoughts which bolted into his mind of their own accord*, he was entirely unacquainted with them. As, however, the arguments adduced by those writers appear to me unanswerable, I shall make use of them on the present occasion. *The word of God, says Mr. Paine, is the Creation we behold, and it is in this word which no human invention can counterfeit or alter, that God speaketh universally to man. It does not depend on the will of man, whether it shall be published or not; it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds; and this word of God reveals to man all that it is necessary for man to know of God.** Other passages to the same effect will occur to such of you as have read the work, and perhaps they have made no small impression on your minds. You may imagine, that if the works of God teach so plainly to *all* men, without any trouble or learning, what they ought to do, there could be no occasion for a Revelation of God's will to them in any other manner. All persons who have attended to the works of God will readily allow that much useful instruction may be derived

* The quotations in *Italicks* in this and the succeeding letters are taken from Mr. Paine's work.

derived from them. From the Creation we are enabled to prove the existence and perfections of the great first cause, a belief in which is certainly the foundation of all Religion. But it does not therefore follow that *it reveals all which is necessary for man to know of God* and the duties which he owes to him. Nor can it with any propriety be called *Revelation*. Mr. Paine indeed defines Revelation to be *something communicated immediately from God to man*, meaning by *immediately* that it must flow *directly* from God to each individual, and not through the medium of another person. But it is evident this is not the sense in which the word is commonly used, and this arbitrary change of signification, whatever might have been the author's intention, is only calculated to deceive. To *reveal* (as every one acquainted with the etymology of the word must know*) signifies to discover that which was before a secret, and Revelation in a religious sense of the term, is God's making known himself or his will, above what he had done by the light of nature. Whether this be done *directly*, or through the medium of another person, is a matter merely circumstantial. In whatever manner it may have pleased God to make such discovery, if it have been made, it is a Revelation. But not to take up your time with a dispute about the meaning of a word, the question to be decided is plainly this:—Are men by reason alone, capable of attaining a knowledge of every thing which it is necessary for them to know concerning God and their duty? Mr. Paine says that they are; the professors of Christianity maintain that they are not, and it is for each of you, after examining the arguments by *your reason*, to determine which you will believe—I say by *your reason*, for, notwithstanding Mr. Paine's assertion, I can assure you that Christians, so far from *despising reason*, appeal to it with confidence, and it is by the help of this excellent gift of God, that they are enabled to establish the truth of Revelation.

Let

* It is one advantage derived from an acquaintance with the dead languages, that we are enabled to understand better the meaning of those words, which have been introduced from them into our own; and, as we have not yet attained the faculty of imparting our ideas to others, but through the medium of language, which like all other human things, is liable to many imperfections and abuses, it may be prudent on this account, not *entirely* to abolish the study of them, lest writers like Mr. Paine, who rely on genius alone, without the aid of literature, or the toil of investigation, increase that inconstancy in the use of words already too great, and instead of advancing, render moral science more difficult than it is at present.

Let me then ask you whether you think it probable that the generality of mankind, if left entirely to themselves, would have acquired just ideas of religious truth, and of the nature, sanctions, and obligations of virtue? Would they have discovered the perfections of the Supreme Being, which we are now capable of proving from his works? And if they had, would they have inferred from them the necessity of pleasing this Being, by an imitation of those perfections? Before you answer me, I would entreat you to consider that most men have not leisure for pursuing such enquiries, for these discoveries could only be the result of long investigation. We find that men have not leisure for them now, nor had they in former periods; they have ever been too much engaged in the bustling scenes of life, providing for their wants, and pursuing the phantoms of ambition, avarice, or pleasure, which afforded little time to contemplate the works of God, in such a manner as would be necessary for deriving from them the instruction Mr. Paine supposes. And even though they had all the leisure which is necessary, and were placed in circumstances every way favourable, yet, can we say they would have inclination for such reflections? Do we find men in general inclined to make use of their advantages in this respect? Or does not your own experience teach you, that they often admire the beauties of the Creation, often observe the starry Heavens, the various tribes of living things which surround them, and all the wonderful works of God, without ever raising their thoughts to him, and inferring the divinity of the author; and still more without ever drawing one moral conclusion respecting their conduct in life? To trace out the principles of natural Religion in their due connection and evidence is a very difficult task: for there is a wide difference between discovering a system of truth, and discerning the reasonableness of it when discovered and proposed to us. We, who live in the midst of light, can scarcely even form a conception of the obscurity, confusion, and uncertainty which may have perplexed the thoughts of the wisest men in the ages of darkness. It probably required greater efforts of reasoning than we are apt upon first thoughts to imagine, to ascertain points which are now looked upon as obvious to the meanest capacity. We should pause then, before we attribute to the perfection of our reasoning powers, that which may be only the result of the situation in which we have been placed.

And

And now let me ask you, can you take upon you to say, that had you not been instructed in the existence of a God and his perfections, you should ever have discovered them from your own observation? Do you think that every man amongst you, however engaged in worldly pursuits, or however indifferent about such enquiries, would be able as he *ran along* to read infinite power, wisdom, and goodness in the Creation; to infer that the Being who made it delighted in virtue, and expected it in his creatures; to find out what those virtues were that he ought to practice; and to deduce even the *probability* of existing hereafter, and being then rewarded or punished according to his present conduct? Supposing that you devoted time to the consideration, have you such confidence in your own powers as to imagine yourselves capable of such discoveries? But though every man be not able to find out the truths of Religion, yet it is possible, you may say, that some person of a contemplative and inquisitive mind, who exercises his reason to the best advantage, or, at least a society of such men by their joint enquiries, may discover a complete system of religion and morals. It is not for me to determine how far the powers of the human mind can go in particular circumstances, but supposing them to have attained this valuable knowledge, would it be an easy task for them to instruct the generality of mankind, to gain their attention, to convince their understandings, to overcome their prejudices, and, above all, to enforce the practice of virtue by proper authority? Would not such men with only the *reasonableness* of their doctrine to recommend them, expose themselves not only to contempt but to persecution, and probably pay for their intrusion with their lives? There seems then little probability that the bulk of mankind, if left to themselves, would acquire just ideas of religious truth, and of the nature, sanctions, and obligations of virtue. The question however of most importance is concerning the fact, whether what has been so boldly asserted, is agreeable to the experience of past ages, which I shall examine in the next Letter.*

* After these remarks on the imperfection of reason, it may be proper to notice the great inconsistency of Mr. Paine, on the subject. When speaking of religious knowledge, he says, *the Creation is an ever existing original which every man can read*, and he asserts also, *that this word of God reveals to man all that is necessary for him to know of God*. Again, when speaking of scientific knowledge, he says in terms precisely similar, *it is the structure of the universe, that has taught this knowledge to man*,

LETTER III.

On the imperfection of Reason.

FELLOW-CITIZENS.

IT is asserted by Mr. Paine, *that the Creation preaches to all nations, and all worlds, and reveals to man all that is necessary for man to know of God.* As it must have done the same in former times if it does so now, the true question is, what was

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man, and that that structure is an ever existing exhibition of every principle upon which every part of Mathematical knowledge is founded. And again, he informs us, that it is from the study of true theology that all our knowledge of science is derived. Now from all this, it would evidently follow that Mr. Paine supposes all men to acquire theological and scientific knowledge in one and the same way, that is by individually contemplating the works of God, and that in his opinion the same rules must apply to the acquisition of the one, as to that of the other. And yet at the distance of a very few pages, he tells us, that almost all the scientific learning that now exists was derived to us from the ancient Greeks, and that this was done by translating the Greek books of Science and Philosophy into the mother-tongue of each nation. He also intimates pretty plainly, that this work of translating was so easy that it might be done by those who were ignorant of the subject, of which the books treated, and, at the same time, that it has been done so effectually, as to render the very languages, in which those books were composed, useless. But this, contradictory as it is to what went before, is not all.—For when he speaks of theological knowledge, he asks, *How was Jesus Christ to make any thing known to all nations? Scarcely any two nations understand each other. And as to translations, every one acquainted with languages knows that it is impossible to translate from one language to another, not only without losing a great part of the original, but even without frequently mistaking the sense.* So then, in short, according to Mr. Paine, all our science is derived from one quarter, viz. from true theology, which true theology every man is to learn for himself from that ever existing original, which every man can read;—and almost all our science is derived to us from another quarter, viz. from old Greek books, which very few could read and which were obliged to be translated in order to their being studied. And also, according to this same gentleman, translation from one language to another, is impossible, without losing great part of the original matter, and frequently mistaking the rest; and at the same time, translation from one language to another is not only possible but easy, so easy as to be done by dunces, in so perfect a manner as actually to supersede the originals! After this who can be astonished to hear from the same authority, that the chief difficulty in learning the dead languages arises from the pronunciation being lost, and that a Roman cow understood the idiom of the Latin tongue better than any Latin linguist that now exists.

Having

the actual state of the world with respect to religion and morals, previous to the publication of the Christian dispensation, for if mankind had not the glorious advantage of a constant, immutable, clear, and universal revelation in the works of God previous to this period, you will scarcely be induced to imagine that they have acquired it since. In discussing then this question of fact, it may first be observed that many of the heathen philosophers of the greatest abilities, and the most inquisitive minds, who were placed in the most advantageous situations for enquiry, who had the best means of information, and who had devoted a great part of their time to this purpose, fell into the most egregious errors, both with respect to the attributes and providence of the Supreme Being, and the nature, obligations,

Having noticed these inconsistencies, it may be asked, if the knowledge of God and the knowledge of science be equally deducible from the works of Creation, and if, notwithstanding this, the generality of individuals, unable *so* to deduce the *principles of science* for themselves, have been *obliged* to have recourse to the aid of more fortunate or more able enquirers who had gone before them, (inasmuch that Mr. Paine himself owns that *almost all* the scientific learning that now exists, was derived from the ancient Greeks,) is it not transcendent rashness to assert that no aid whatever is necessary in investigating the *principles of Religion*, and is it not much more reasonable to conclude that the mass of mankind, at least, stand as much in need of assistance in deducing the *knowledge of God* from the works of Creation, as they confessedly do in deducing the *knowledge of science* from the same source?

Again, if it be granted that *some* assisting means may be necessary in the case of *religious knowledge*, as experience has proved them to be in the case of *scientific knowledge*, is it not reasonable to conclude that as the former is still more generally essential to human happiness than the latter, God, by his providence, would afford such means to mankind in the one instance, as it is evident he has done in the other?

Thirdly, if we only suppose *such means*, to be once *in existence*, means as well fitted to aid man in theological knowledge, as the old Greek books of which Mr. Paine speaks, were fitted to aid them in scientific knowledge, is it not obvious to reason that the one might be just as communicable from age to age, and from country to country as the other, and is it not the height of wilful absurdity to assert that that medium of conveyance, viz. *translation from language to language*, which it is owned has been practicable and successful in the case of science should be inadequate or inapplicable in the cognate case of theology?

It may also be asked, does not Mr. Paine's own sitting down to write a book to instruct men in what he is pleased to call *the true theology*, imply that he himself conceives some assistance to be necessary over and above the works of Creation to lead men to the knowledge of God, and does not his addressing his book as well to the French nation, as to those who speak his own language, fully demonstrate the folly and partiality of his assertion with respect to the impossibility of conveying religious knowledge through the medium of a translation?

obligations, and sanctions of virtue. Amongst the heathen philosophers, Socrates is generally supposed to have been the wisest and best; and according to the accounts we have of him, he was certainly an excellent character. He lived to the age of seventy, in the most flourishing period with respect to arts and sciences, of the most distinguished city of Greece, a country which from its extraordinary advancement in civilization, was led to consider all the rest of mankind as barbarians. He enjoyed perfect leisure for prosecuting any studies he engaged in, and seems to have spent almost his whole life in acquiring and communicating knowledge. Here, then, was a man every way qualified for making those great discoveries by reason alone, were it possible to make them: and though he never published any thing himself, we have copious accounts of his opinions in the writings of his eminent disciples Xenophon and Plato. Now it appears that Socrates conformed himself, and advised his followers to conform to the worship of those Gods, which the state acknowledged, and that he frequently sacrificed to them in publick, from which we may fairly infer that Socrates, with all his wisdom, was unable to discover the absurdity of polytheism, although he pointed out many abuses; for I am not willing to believe that so good a moralist would be guilty of *mental lying*, and even in the moment of dissolution would appoint a sacrifice which he deemed entirely unnecessary. Socrates seems likewise to have been a believer in oracles and divination, of which he made great use; and so far was he from thinking natural philosophy the best guide to true religion, that he seems rather to have discouraged it, and to have considered it as above the reach of human reason. Socrates was the first Greek philosopher who applied himself principally to morals, and he excelled both in precepts and practice all who succeeded him. Yet excellent as his morality was upon the whole, the practice of common swearing, to which he was addicted, argued a want of proper reverence for God, whilst his speaking of the *barbarians*, that is, all other nations, as natural enemies to the Greeks, with whom they should be continually at war, and on whom they might, of course, inflict every kind of outrage, is not easily reconcileable to humanity. Respecting a future state, this great man seems to have been in much uncertainty, and the arguments he advances to prove it are very weak and inconclusive. Of the Greek philosophers in general, none of whom seem to have

been equal to Socrates in wisdom or virtue, it may be observed, that though the greater part acknowledged one Supreme God, they taught at the same time, and with the same sincerity, the worship of many subordinate deities, some of whom were of the most wicked and immoral characters. The homage due to the Supreme Being, was swallowed up and lost in their attention to the variety of sacrifices appointed to be performed to these false and imaginary deities: and their conceptions of God were either so erroneous or unsettled, that they could not have any effect in promoting virtuous practice, or administering consolation in the seasons of distress, or in the hour of death. It is but just however to own, that the writings of the philosophers contain many excellent truths, fine sentiments, and precepts both of the moral and devout kind. And there was even cause to regret, that there was no method of propagating these instructions among the people, though perhaps they would have had little influence upon minds darkened, and corrupted with the lowest, and most abominable superstitions. It may indeed be doubted, whether even men of learning and education were able to protect themselves from the corrupting influence of the low and immoral characters of the Gods, whom they thought themselves bound to worship.

Confucius, the famous Chinese philosopher, has been particularly mentioned by Mr. Paine. Though I have often heard him and his followers highly extolled, yet I considered our sources of information on the subject so imperfect, that I acknowledge, I never enquired into his character till I undertook these Letters. It has been long the practice of infidels to bring up the Chinese in one form or other, though it does not appear that they are more wise or virtuous than other nations who have had similar advantages. They have improved much in the arts and sciences, considering their situation, but they fall far short of Europeans. Their philosophy has many absurdities, and their morality seems very indifferent both in theory and practice: so little benefit have they reaped from the labours and precepts of Confucius. Most of what we know concerning this philosopher, who, like Socrates, devoted his principal attention to morals, is calculated to raise him in our esteem; but there seems to have been an austerity in his precepts, which places him far below that teacher, *whose yoke was easy, and his burden light.* With respect to religion, he

he appears to have believed in the superstitious opinions of his countrymen ; and I cannot find that he had any notion of a future state, which it seems his followers expressly deny.— From the idea Mr. Paine's works have given me, of the little knowledge he has acquired by *reading*, I am inclined to think that he introduced Confucius, without a previous enquiry into his character and principles. I am the more induced to think so, from a circumstance recorded of him by Dr. Leland,* which he takes from an author much prejudiced in his favour. " Confucius," he says, " blamed those who " did not worship according to the accustomed rites, but were " ambitious to sacrifice to a higher kind of spirits than their " condition allowed. For, according to the Chinese laws, " none but the Emperor was to offer sacrifices with solemn " rites to heaven, and to the earth. The tributary Kings and " Princes, who were next in dignity to the Emperor, were " allowed to sacrifice to the mountains and rivers, or to their " spirits: the inferior governors to inferior things; and so " on: every one was to offer sacrifices according to the rank " of the offerer, and the spirits to which he sacrificed. Confucius was for having this order strictly observed; from " whence it is evident, that he considered religion chiefly in " a political view." You will perhaps be surprised after having read this, to find the *author of the Rights of Man*, the avowed champion of *liberty and equality*, putting Confucius as a teacher of morality on a level with Christ, and I should wonder too, could I imagine that he was more acquainted with that philosopher and his opinions, than the most ignorant person who may chance to read these letters. Christ certainly teaches no such distinction in worship, nor is there any sect of Christians I know of, which forbids the king and the beggar to pay their homage to the same God who is over all, and who is no respecter of persons. To Confucius and the Greek philosophers, whose systems in Mr. Paine's opinion equalled that of Christ, he has added the Quakers, a compliment for which, I imagine, that respectable body will not be much obliged to him: since, though Mr. Paine may be ignorant of it, they have ever acknowledged Christ as their master, and profess to have

* In his work entitled *The advantage and necessity of the Christian Revelation*, from which, and Dr. Leechman's *Sermon on the wisdom of God*, many observations in this letter have been taken.

have derived their system from his precepts and example, as represented in the New Testament.* From the very cursory view I have taken of the subject, it will, I hope, appear to you, that the light of nature was not of itself sufficient to prevent men who had every natural advantage, from falling into egregious errors respecting the nature of the supreme Being, and the duties of man, and, that it was not able to teach them the certainty, nor even, the strong probability of a future state of existence. Erroneous, however, as were the opinions, and imperfect as was the practice of the philosophers, very few of whom deserve to be classed with Socrates and Confucius, the people in general were still more ignorant and vicious, and the religious principles they had, instead of restraining their passions, furnished the most powerful motives to the practice of vice. There was not a crime which can disgrace human nature, which was not attributed to some or other of their Gods, and their practice was often considered as an excuse, and even as an example for their worshippers. From the length of time in which the wisest and most polished nations continued in this state of ignorance and corruption, it was manifest that natural means were not sufficient to enlighten their minds, and reform their conduct. These had been long tried without effect. For while arts and sciences were cultivated, and brought to a considerable degree of perfection, religious notions and religious rites became, if possible, more absurd. To the worship of the heavenly bodies, the polished Egyptians and Greeks added that of dead men. If then *the world by its own wisdom knew not God*, if men did not make a right use of their reason, nor were sufficiently apprized of all the consequences of their conduct, and if they wanted stronger motives than would ever occur to themselves to the practice of universal virtue—in these circumstances was it not highly expedient, that the great parent and friend of mankind should interpose to apprise them of these consequences, that he should send proper persons duly authorized to engage their attention, and thus to inform their judgment, interest their affections, and direct their conduct? Considering the benevolence of the supreme Being, may we not say that it was not only expedient, but highly probable,

* “ To say the morality of the Quakers is very like the morality of the gospel, is as if a man were to make the observation, that the English was a fine language, and that what they spoke in Yorkshire bore a wonderful resemblance to it.” *Critical Review* for Sept. 1794.

bable, that he would assist his creatures, and enable them to become more virtuous and happy?

Another circumstance, which I would urge to you, is, that had our religious and moral knowledge been derived from the light of nature alone, it would have gradually improved, whereas it manifestly degenerated. Some of the oldest and best philosophers acknowledge, that they did not *discover* their most important doctrines, but received them from ancient tradition. The first sages, who were not so puffed up with conceited notions of the power of their own reason, as to reject all traditionary opinions and *hearsay evidence*, spoke frequently more justly and more worthily of the Deity and Providence, and with less hesitation of a future state, than their successors, whose pride of understanding made them depend on their own reasoning. To this it may be added, that Confucius acknowledged having received his system, from philosophers who lived several hundred years before his time, and this was the case with Zoroaster, and other ancient sages. From these circumstances may we not infer, that the best knowledge the ancient philosophers had, was derived by tradition from some former revelation made by God to mankind? How else could the knowledge of morals have made such a progress in the world, at a period when philosophy and science were very little known? Or how else could it happen, that as these were improved by the light of reason, the other should have so manifestly declined? How otherwise can it be accounted for, that the Jews in other respects so unenlightened, should in the knowledge of the Deity, and in a moral system have so far excelled more polished nations? Mr. Paine supposes the *starry Heavens* would teach such things, why then did they not do so? Why as men became more acquainted with them and nature in general, did they degenerate in religious knowledge? Or by what means has it happened that this word of God, so visible to all and so easily read, has not better instructed those who are still in idolatry, and have not had their understandings perverted, or *their genius killed* by the nipping blasts of Christian schools? Their *learning is not cut down to the narrow sphere of linguistry*, and yet with equal natural powers, we do not find that their philosophy or religion is to be compared with that of Christians, though the system of the latter

is asserted by Mr. Paine to have been the cause of all the ignorance which was in the world since its propagation.* I would mention further, that many of the ancient philosophers were not insensible of the darkness in which they were involved, and expressed in strong terms the sense they had of the uncertainty of their own reasonings and of their need of a better guide; and Socrates in particular said, that there was no hope of amending men's morals unless God should be pleased to send some other person to instruct them. It seems then to have been the fact, that no sect of philosophers had attained any thing like a full conviction concerning the unity, attributes, and moral government of God; that they had very imperfect ideas of the just extent of moral virtue, and that the knowledge they had of a future state added little or no strength to its obligations; that the practice of the gentile world was such as might be expected from the general corruption of their moral and religious principles; that instead of amending, they evidently degenerated notwithstanding the improvement of science; that their best moral precepts were derived from tradition, and not from their own reasoning, which affords a presumption that Revelation was the source of them; and that the wisest and best heathens had noticed the want of a divine illumination. I hope, that even in the short view I have taken of them, enough has been said to establish these points, and to satisfy you that such being the circumstances of the world, a divine interposition was expedient, as it would be so seasonable and advantageous. "We may almost say (observes Dr. Priestley†) that it became the great and good parent of the human race, to afford his creatures and offspring that assistance which in their situation they so much wanted, and which they were not capable of procuring for themselves."

* It may be here observed, that Mr. Paine himself seems to own that he was indebted for most of his knowledge in astronomy and mechanicks, which he has so pompously displayed, to the lectures of Messrs. Martin and Ferguson, and the acquaintance of Dr. Bevis, and not to his own deductions from the works of Creation.

† There are many passages in these letters taken from the writings of this distinguished man in defence of Revelation; a man whose excellent moral character and most comprehensive genius must entitle him to respect, from all who cultivate science and truth, whatever they may think of his peculiar opinions.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

*On the excellency of the Christian
Doctrine.*

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

IT is one of the great objects of Mr. Paine's work, to show that reason alone is sufficient to teach us all that is necessary for us to know, and consequently that there was no occasion for any farther revelation. In the two last letters, I have endeavoured to establish both by argument and facts, that men were not able by reason alone, to acquire just ideas of God and their duty; that they actually made no such discoveries previous to the appearance of Christ, and that of course, it would be absurd to suppose they *could* have done so then, or now. And such being the state of the world, idolatry and wickedness prevailing amongst all nations, was it not to be expected, that an infinitely powerful and benevolent Being, as Mr. Paine acknowledges God to be, should assist his creatures by giving them that information of which they were so much in need? Now there are certain books handed down to us, professing to contain a history of one Jesus Christ, who assumed the character of a divine teacher; which books are said to have been written by his disciples, and contain the doctrines which he is said to have taught, and the precepts he is said to have delivered, and there are certain other books of greater antiquity, which, besides much historical information, contain a previous revelation, said to have been delivered by God through one Moses and others to the Jews. These are the writings which we Christians regard, as containing God's own discovery of himself and his will to man. In these records, we believe, may be found that satisfactory information respecting God's nature and perfections, and our duty to him, which the brightest geniuses of the heathen world were unable to acquire. And to these volumes, in our opinion, the modern world is indebted for its superior acquaintance with the principles of moral truth and moral duty. But to these books Mr. Paine objects, not only as being destitute of that divine authority which we ascribe to them; but also as being intrinsically

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deficient

deficient with respect to those truths, which they profess to teach, and of consequence, as being inadequate to the design for which we assert them to have been intended. And on these grounds he boldly asserts the scriptures to be useless. *Do we, says he, want to know what God is? Search not the book which is called the scripture, and which any human hand could make, but the scripture called the creation.* And in order to make good his charge, he tells you soon after, that *a few chapters in Job, and the nineteenth Psalm,* are almost the only parts of the book called the bible, that convey to us any idea of God, which books are true deistical compositions, for they treat of the Deity through his works.* And as he seems not to know, that the New Testament bears the same relation to the bible, which a part does to the whole, he tells you again, that he *recollects not a single passage in all the writings ascribed to the men called apostles, that conveys any idea of what God is.* These are strong assertions, and with a man who has never read the bible, and believes Mr. Paine to be well acquainted with it, they may have weight. Those however who have read the book in question, will imagine his memory to be a very bad one, and will perhaps think it strange, that he should say so much against a book of which he knows so little, and which he wanted either power or inclination to consult.† Such of you, my friends, being satisfied of the falsity of Mr. Paine's assertion, may think any further

* Mr. Paine mentions the 19th Psalm as *deistical*, that is, teaching the perfections of God from his works only, and therefore I suppose unfavourable to the notion of a revealed will of God. Had we not had sufficient proof of his complete ignorance of scripture, this would have furnished an instance of it, for though the first six verses paraphrased by Mr. Addison, and through his means, known to Mr. Paine, speak of the Creation; the remainder of the Psalm is supposed, and I think with reason, to refer to a written law of God, with which the writer was acquainted, and the excellency of which he had experienced.

† "It is indeed the extreme of arrogance, to write against books, which, to put them in the lowest point of view, are respectable for their antiquity; interesting from the traces they afford of history and manners, far hidden within the obscurity of remote periods; admirable for their beauty and sublimity, inestimable for the treasures of moral precept, and fervent effusions of piety, which they contain; a very storehouse, and magazine, whence, through so many centuries, the devout heart has ever drawn its brightest ideas, and clothed its aspirations in the most animated language—to write, we say, against books, whose claims to our attention are so numerous, and not to think it necessary to consult, in order to confute them." — *Critical Review*, for September 1794.

further notice of it unnecessary, but for their sakes who know not the scriptures, and in pursuance of that plan, which I conceive suitable to the subject, I shall proceed to show that the scriptures of the Old and New Testament do give us the same ideas of God, which we are enabled to deduce by the light of nature, and far superior to all that had been discovered by it at the time of their publication, and for the purpose of more clearly showing that Mr. Paine had no foundation for his assertion I shall particularly notice those ideas of God which he has mentioned.* Amongst these you may have observed the unity of God, for his belief in which he has given no reason and it is a truth, which all the wisdom of Grecian antiquity was unable clearly to discover. But what did Moses teach? **HEAR O ISRAEL, THE LORD THY GOD IS ONE LORD.** Deut. vi. 4. What does the Evangelist tell us that Christ taught? **AND JESUS ANSWERED HIM, THE FIRST OF ALL THE COMMANDMENTS IS, HEAR O ISRAEL THE LORD OUR GOD IS ONE LORD, AND THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND, AND WITH ALL THY STRENGTH.** Mark, xii. 29, 30. I forbear quoting other passages, though many occur, because these sufficiently show that Moses and Christ taught that God is one, which certainly gives us *some idea* of him. Our reason teaches us that God was the first cause of all things, and has existed from all eternity. The scripture also says, **IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.** Gen. i. **THE LORD IS THE TRUE GOD AND EVERLASTING KING. HE HATH MADE THE EARTH BY HIS POWER, HE HATH ESTABLISHED THE WORLD BY HIS WISDOM, AND HATH STRETCHED OUT THE HEAVENS BY HIS DISCRETION.** Jerem. x. 10. &c. And St. Paul says, **WE PREACH UNTO YOU, THAT YE SHOULD TURN FROM THESE VANITIES UNTO THE LIVING GOD, WHO MADE THE HEAVEN AND**
D 2 EARTH,

* It will be observed that Mr. Paine has admitted the existence and perfections of God as deducible from his works, and that he justly infers from them some excellent moral virtues. But it must be remembered that Mr. Paine was educated a Christian, and has resided in a Christian country, and that there is a very great difference between perceiving the reasonableness of what is proposed, and originally discovering it. Till Deists can show that men have had such notions of the Deity who never heard of revealed religion, we are justified in thinking that they owe much more to it than they are willing to acknowledge.

EARTH, AND THE SEA, AND ALL THINGS THAT ARE THEREIN. Acts, xiv. 15. The Greeks, by their wisdom, had never discovered that God was the first cause and creator of all things; they thought the creation of equal age with their Gods; but the same St. Paul had more rational notions, and gives a most noble idea of the supreme Being, in his address to the Athenians; GOD THAT MADE THE WORLD, AND ALL THINGS THEREIN, SEEING THAT HE IS LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, DWELLETH NOT IN TEMPLES MADE WITH HANDS, NEITHER IS WORSHIPPED WITH MEN'S HANDS, AS THOUGH HE NEEDED ANY THING, SEEING HE GIVETH TO ALL LIFE AND BREATH, AND ALL THINGS; AND HATH MADE OF ONE BLOOD ALL NATIONS OF MEN, FOR TO DWELL ON ALL THE FACE OF THE EARTH, AND HATH DETERMINED THE TIMES BEFORE APPOINTED, AND THE BOUNDS OF THEIR HABITATION. Acts xvii. 24. &c. And in the ninetyeth Psalm, Moses, the supposed author, addressing God, says, BEFORE THE MOUNTAINS WERE BROUGHT FORTH, OR EVER THOU HADST FORMED THE EARTH AND THE WORLD, EVEN FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING THOU ART GOD. By the light of nature we infer the power and wisdom of the great first cause from his works of Creation and Providence. *We see his power in the immensity of the Creation, and his wisdom in the unchangeable order by which the incomprehensible whole is governed.* The scriptures teach the same attributes and describe them by a reference to his works. He is there spoken of as the POSSESSOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH and all things which they contain, who preserveth them all, and by whose ordinances the hosts of heaven regulate all their motions; and to enable us to conceive what is meant by his wisdom, he is described AS WONDERFUL IN COUNSEL, AND EXCELLENT IN WORKING. And as a striking and poetical description both of his power and wisdom inferred from his works, I will recommend to your perusal the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, beginning at the 12th verse; * for though Mr. Paine might be unable to procure a bible, none of you can lie under a similar disadvantage, since if you are without that

It may be proper to observe, as there are different translations of the bible, that the references I have made, are equally applicable to the Doway and common version. They, and every other, which I have had an opportunity of perusing, agree in the main, though they differ materially in a few passages.

that useful book yourselves, some of your acquaintance will be able to supply you. Another attribute of the Deity deducible from his works of Creation, is munificence, which as Mr. Paine observes, is inferred *from the abundance with which God fills the earth.* You will remember that the scriptures ascribe to him the same perfection. **THE LORD IS GOOD TO ALL, AND HIS TENDER MERCIES ARE OVER ALL HIS WORKS. THE EARTH IS FULL OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD. THE EYES OF ALL WAIT UPON THEE, AND THOU GIVEST THEM THEIR MEAT IN DUE SEASON. THOU OPENEST THINE HAND AND SATISFIEST THE DESIRE OF EVERY LIVING THING.** Psalm cxlv. 9, 15. And in the writings of the Apostles, we are taught that **GOD IS LOVE, AND THAT EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, AND COMETH DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS.** James i. 17. And as reason teaches us to infer God's mercy from his not *withholding that abundance even from the unthankful,* so the scriptures declare that **GOD MAKETH HIS SUN TO RISE ON THE EVIL AND ON THE GOOD, AND SENDETH RAIN ON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST.** The same perfections of God, then, which are reckoned amongst the clearest deductions of reason, and which are mentioned by Mr. Paine as taught in the *scripture called the Creation,* appear also to be taught in that book which we have been accustomed to regard as the word of God, and Mr. Paine is clearly convicted of having asserted what is not true, in saying that the bible conveys to us no idea of God. I might point out to you many other perfections attributed to God in these books, which are agreeable to reason, and calculated to give us nobler conceptions of the supreme Being, but it is I trust sufficiently established that the ideas they give us of God are suitable to the light of nature, and far superior to what had been discovered by it at the period of Christ's appearance, even though we had not reason to ascribe much of what was known to a traditionary revelation.

I would next observe that these scriptures also contain a body of moral principles in the highest degree worthy of God, and such as considering the wisdom and goodness of his nature, might be deemed suitable for him to communicate to ignorant and erring mankind. Mr. Paine wishing to exalt *natural* at the expence of *revealed* religion, observes that from *God's munificence*

nificence to all; men may learn to be kind to each other, as if the scriptures had omitted to teach this excellent doctrine, or had in this instance, contradicted the light of nature. But the fact is far otherwise; for the bible teaches the purest, the most universal benevolence. The writings of the apostles, which Mr. Paine has called *gloomy and controversial*, and which he seems chiefly to detest, give us frequent, plain, and most excellent precepts respecting brotherly love. Our Saviour says, that THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT OF THE LAW IS, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF, and by neighbour, he evidently means every man, of whatever nation, or party he be, who stands in need of our assistance, or with whom we have any connection. And the apostle Paul says, Rom. xiii. 8. that HE THAT LOVETH ANOTHER, HATH FULFILLED THE LAW; and we are urged to do this, because GOD IS LOVE, and we ought to SHOW OURSELVES THE CHILDREN OF OUR FATHER, WHO IS IN HEAVEN, WHO MAKETH HIS SUN TO RISE ON THE EVIL AND ON THE GOOD, AND SENDETH RAIN ON THE JUST AND UNJUST. Nor is the morality of the scriptures confined to benevolence. They also teach us, as we might justly expect, that the chief thing which God requires of man is purity of heart, and integrity of life, or the genuine principles, the uniform practice, and the confirmed habits of all moral virtue; comprehending an unfeigned reverence and love of himself, the highest respect for his authority, and an humble and cheerful submission to all the dispensations of his providence, together with all the natural expressions of our dependance upon him, and obligation to him. They also teach, as we have seen, that he requires of us a sincere regard to the welfare of our fellow-creatures, and all those actions which naturally arise from that generous principle, namely, all the duties of justice, equity and humanity: and as we might farther expect from such a being, he interposes his authority in favour of those virtues, which more immediately respect ourselves, and the government of our appetites and passions, and commands us to be chaste and temperate, humble, meek, contented and diligent; no slaves to violent and unreasonable passions, or to any affection of mind, by which we might debase our natures, or expose ourselves to the temptation of disturbing and injuring others.

Such is in few words the *morality* of the bible, and it is such as is perfectly agreeable to reason, consistent with the attributes

attributes of God, and calculated to promote our happiness in the world. I shall now add, that the scriptures not only contain a most excellent system of morality, but are calculated to enforce it by precepts, and point out the way of improving in, and adhering to it. The morality taught in the bible is conveyed in plain rules of conduct, and authoritative denunciations, which experience has shown to have more effect in making men really virtuous, than the speculations of reason and philosophy. These precepts too are plain to the meanest capacity, and may be understood by children at a very early age. We are also taught how to improve in, and adhere to virtue. For this purpose, the sacred writings propose constant watchfulness, frequent meditation on the works and word of God, a careful choice of good company, and great resolution, and self-denial, whenever bad habits are become predominant. They moreover advise all persons to watch over one another, and to do every thing to mutual edification. I may add, that they appoint several observances, which are not in themselves matters of moral obligation, but which ultimately tend to promote good morals, and that just state of mind, which makes the practice of our duty in other respects easy to us. Finally, the sacred writings afford the strongest inducements to act well. They teach us that God is perfectly acquainted with all our thoughts and actions, and that the virtuous are objects of his favour, whilst the wicked are an offence to him. They appeal to our gratitude, by urging us to show the sense we have of God's favours, by obedience to his reasonable commandments. They hold out to our view, the dignity of our nature, as beings created in the image of God, and endowed with reasoning powers, which exalt us far above the brute creatures around us, and they call upon us to act, as becomes the children of God—but above all, they confirm, if they did not originally discover, the doctrine of a future state, in which those who have done evil, must expect punishment, whilst those who have done good, shall be exalted to glory, honour and immortality. And “ how different, how superior a being must this
 “ view properly impressed on the mind, make a man ! It is a
 “ difference not easy to describe, but it may be felt. A being
 “ of a day will have his views, thoughts and schemes adapted
 “ to a day. To-morrow cannot interest him, because he has
 “ no interest in it. If he like the scenes of the day, to which
 “ his existence is confined, his heart must sicken at the idea
 “ of

“ of any thing beyond it, because he is totally excluded from
 “ it. What then must be the feelings of the man, who truly
 “ and habitually believes, that he is born for eternity; that
 “ years and ages bear no sensible proportion to the term of his
 “ existence; that the duration of the sun, moon, and stars,
 “ is no more than a period that divides his existence, and
 “ afflicts him in measuring it; that when they shall be no more
 “ he only as it were begins to be, and that other suns, and
 “ other worlds, will be equally short-lived with respect to
 “ him. How sublime and how animating the thought! Can
 “ any thing mean and sordid occupy the breast of a being,
 “ who is persuaded of this grand destination? Will he not
 “ overlook every thing temporary, and be ever stretching
 “ his thoughts to things eternal, in which his interest is infi-
 “ nitely greater than in any thing here?”* And does Mr.
 Paine believe in this doctrine, so favourable to virtue? *He*
hopes for happiness beyond this life, and believing the power of
 God to continue his existence, *he thinks it more probable that*
he shall continue to exist hereafter, than that he should have had
existence before that existence began. And will *this mere hope*
of happiness be productive of any moral effect? Is it sufficient
 to prevent any thing mean or sordid from occupying a man's
 breast? Does it propose happiness, as the consequence and
 reward of virtue, and teach him to avoid vice, as the source
 of punishment and misery? Unless it do this, it is of little, if
 of any, real use, since nothing but a firm conviction of such a
 state of retribution will have much effect on the generality of
 men. On what Mr. Paine founds his probability, he leaves
 his readers to imagine, but we know well, that arguments de-
 rived from the light of nature, have frequently been produced
 both in ancient and modern times, in favour of the doctrine
 of a future state, which certainly deserve attention; these ar-
 guments, however considered by themselves, do not seem to
 be clear and satisfactory—they may awaken ardent desires,
 but cannot found firm hopes. “ That kind of light,” to use
 the words of the late excellent Dr. Leechman, “ is too weak
 “ and too dubious to be of any great service to the vulgar
 “ sight, which every passing cloud conceals even from the
 “ philosophick eye. The philosopher while warmed with his
 “ own reasoning, and while at ease and in health, may
 “ exult

exult in the pleasing theory of immortal happiness—but this theory is in great danger of failing him, when he stands most in need of its consolation and support. Whereas, the faith of a Christian, if it be really well founded, is a fixed and steady light, flowing from the declarations of him who came to bear witness to the truth, and who assured us that *he was himself the resurrection and the life, and that he who believeth on him, though he were dead yet should he live*—and it is a light that never deserts him, but on the contrary, shines brightest in the darkest season of distress." Had Mr. Paine declared his reasons for hope, they would probably have appeared obscure to you, but the declarations of Christianity are so clear and convincing, that they afford equal benefit to the enlightened philosopher and the illiterate peasant. Eternity is as it were unveiled before us, and the manner of this future life so far discovered that we can easily comprehend it. If Christ really died and rose again, then there can be no doubt that we also shall be raised at the last day to receive rewards or punishments according to our actions. Nor is this a speculative point, the operation of which is confined to the understanding alone; it spreads its influence into every part of the soul, and revives and invigorates all its powers; like the light of heaven it brings with it a vital heat, which warms the affections and subdues the will, thus producing the most favourable effects on the lives and conversations of those who truly believe in it. And can you avoid feeling a desire of the truth of such a doctrine as this? Will you readily and without very sufficient grounds, give up your firm conviction of it, as founded on the declarations of Christ, recorded in the scriptures? Will you willingly resign your greatest consolation in the hour of distress, or in the evening of life? I trust not. Imagine not however that I call upon you to believe in revelation, for the reasons I have now been urging—I have only wished to remove some of the prejudices, which Mr. Paine may have occasioned against it. No: the evidences of the gospel of Christ, rest upon a much stronger foundation, they are built upon an immovable rock, and I have no doubt, however circumstances may occasion the progress of infidelity for a season, that the more Christianity is discussed, the more its evidences are enquired into, the firmer will be our conviction of its truth. At present, what I desire is, that the noble ideas which revelation gives us of God, so consistent with

what we infer from reason ; the excellent system of morality it teaches ; the instructions it gives for improvement in virtue, and the strong inducements it holds out to act well, particularly by the prospect of a future state of retribution ; I am desirous, I say, that these things may abate your prejudices, if you have any, and dispose you to attend to the arguments which I shall lay before you.

L E T T E R V.

Some objections considered.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THAT in the circumstances of the world at the time of the first preaching of Christianity, some revelation from God was *expedient*, and considering his goodness, even *probable*, and that what has been handed down to us as a revelation from God, is such as might be expected from him, being calculated to render men virtuous and happy, are points which I hope have been satisfactorily established ; there are however some objections made by Mr. Paine, which strike at the very root of revealed religion, by, in a manner, denying the possibility of it. As I know these objections have made an impression upon the minds of some amongst you, I shall briefly consider them in this letter. One of these objections is founded on the establishments of different churches or religions in different places, all of which consider themselves as in the right, and accuse those of other persuasions of unbelief : he particularly instances *the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mahometan churches, each of which established itself by pretending some special commission from God, communicated to certain individuals, and each of which shows certain books which they call revelation, or the word of God ; all of which he therefore rejects.* In reply to this, I would observe, that it does not follow, because all these churches cannot be true that therefore none can ; that pretended revelations even furnish a strong argument in favour of a genuine revelation, since they show that the conscious wants of man led him to expect one : and that the proper way is to examine the evidence which each produces in support of its divine

divine original, and then to determine which of them has claim to our belief, or whether all ought to be rejected. To pass judgment against any church, merely because it has been established, and even perverted to a *monopoly of power and profit*, has more the appearance of prejudice, than of the calm determination of unbiassed *reason*. And the peculiar unfairness of passing judgment in this manner on the Christian Church, will appear clearly when it is considered, that the great founder of Christianity did not himself set up a *religion of pomp and revenue*, but positively declared that his KINGDOM WAS NOT OF THIS WORLD; that his disciples were men of an humble station in life; and that for three hundred years his religion was not established, but that the professors of it were objects of reproach and persecution; that since Christianity has been established in many countries, the clergy of establishments have shown, on different occasions, that they regarded what they deemed to be their duty more than honour and emoluments, and have risked, or even sacrificed the latter when they could not otherwise keep their conscience pure; * that in most of these countries, there have been different sects, which on account of not adopting the national faith have, not only, been excluded from a participation of the emoluments annexed to it, but have sometimes been treated with the greatest cruelty, and yet have continued zealously attached to the common cause; that some of these, as the Quakers, have even excluded every appearance of a priesthood and interested teachers, whilst others are adverse to every kind of religious establishment; and that, if prejudice will rank the clergy of all denominations as knaves or fools, still that religion

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which

* As the clergy of establishments, and especially the dignified clergy, seem most liable from their situation to this charge of considering religion as the mere instrument of *pomp and revenue*; it is with pleasure I notice the case of several bishops about the period of the revolution; who first dared the displeasure of king James, so as to be committed to the tower, and afterwards resigned their bishopricks rather than take the oaths to his successor. Whether their opinion was, or was not well founded, is not the question. It shows that in *their* view there was something of more importance than their secular advantages. And it should be remembered that in this case there was no question at issue in which their secular interests were concerned, but they had the same security for enjoying their honours and emoluments under William as under James. Such conscientious conduct is entitled to the warmest approbation, however mistaken we may esteem the principles of the men, and such conduct has not been unfrequent amongst the teachers of Christianity.

which was adopted on enquiry by Bacon, Newton, Locke, and others, the most distinguished names in every kind of science, who could have had no motive but the love of truth, that religion, I say, should not be rejected, merely, because whether properly or improperly, it has become connected with the civil power.

Mr. Paine's objections taken from peculiar doctrines held by different sects of Christians, and from the persecutions and wars which Christianity has given rise to, are equally weak and unfounded. I have already remarked on the injustice and absurdity of charging Christianity with the opinions which its professors have adopted, without first showing that those opinions are necessarily connected with it, and especially when it is notorious that they are not held by Christians universally, but while professed by some, are disclaimed by others. And with respect to the persecutions and wars which the Christian religion may have occasioned in the world, the charge made by Mr. Paine is, if possible, still more unjust; because he himself must know, that the New Testament reprobates persecution and disclaims persecutors. YE KNOW NOT, saith Christ to such, WHAT SPIRIT YE ARE OF, (that is, YE ARE NOT OF MY SPIRIT) FOR THE SON OF MAN IS NOT COME TO DESTROY MEN'S LIVES BUT TO SAVE THEM. Little as Mr. Paine seems to be acquainted with the Christian scriptures, he could not possibly be ignorant that such is their uniform language, and his bringing forward such an imputation, gives but too good reason to suspect him of some degree of *infidelity*, even in his own sense,—I mean that he is not always so *mentally faithful* to himself, as he would wish us to believe. And here let me once for all observe, with respect to the charges made against Christianity, on account of opinions or practices imputable to its professors, that the Christian religion itself is on fair and equitable principles, no farther chargeable with these, than as they are sanctioned in the book, which we call the scriptures.—If the doctrines or conduct in question be clearly taught and recommended there as parts of the Christian system, then it is the part of the advocate for Christianity to defend them, or to give up the cause. But if this cannot be shown, then such doctrines, or such practices are no more chargeable on the Christian religion, than all the follies of pagan theology are chargeable on Mr. Paine's own belief that *there is a God*. Mr. Paine would resort to his
scriptures

scriptures in case of such a charge from an Atheist, and would assert that the volume of Creation taught no such extravagancies. We have an equal right to resort to our scriptures in similar attacks from Mr. Paine and his Deistical brethren, and may just as fairly assert against them, that our scriptures furnish no grounds for their accusations. What Mr. Paine would claim from an Atheist, we have just as good a right to claim from Mr. Paine.

Another of Mr. Paine's objections to Christianity, is its want of universality, *that the way to God is not open to every man alike*. This appears at first sight, to have more weight than it really has. If a divine revelation, it is said, be necessary to the happiness of some, it is to that of all; now a powerful, wise, and good Being, as God is, would have made all partakers of it, therefore it cannot be needful to any. But if this reasoning is true, it would follow that neither is that religion, which Mr. Paine supposes we may learn from contemplating the works of nature, necessary; for notwithstanding what Mr. Paine says of its universality, experience has fully shown that it is not universal. All men have not leisure or abilities to discover the truths of it, and therefore it might as well be asserted that there is no occasion even for it:—a conclusion which would overturn Mr. Paine's deistical system, and completely destroy all moral obligation. The whole force of this objection to Christianity from the want of universality, is derived from a position respecting the moral attributes of God, that he deals with all his creatures in an equally favourable manner, a supposition which appears upon the most transient view of things, to be utterly false. Witness the condition of those, who inhabit countries situated in very high northern and southern latitudes, or in the parched deserts of Africa, compared with that of those dwelling in the more temperate parts of the globe. Why God has been pleased to make those differences, it would be vain and presumptuous to determine. But we know that such is the fact. And since the rule clearly holds with respect to all the blessings of the moral world, and even with respect to the requisites for moral happiness also, can we give any good reason why it should not extend to the best of all blessings, *revealed religion*? Were a person to object to the goodness of God, because the worm which crawls on the ground, has not powers equal to his own, he would be thought very unreasonable, since the worm and all other creatures have powers

powers suited to their respective states, which is a strong proof of wise design, and benevolent execution. Were a man to refuse to make use of the powers with which he is gifted, or to enjoy the favourable circumstances in which he is placed, because the powers of others are not equal, or their circumstances unfavourable, he would probably be regarded as a madman:—yet exactly similar is the conduct of him, who enjoying the light of Christianity rejects the benefit, because there are others who do not partake of it. The want of universality on the contrary then, furnishes an argument in favour of Christianity, by its being perfectly analogous to the course of nature. And it is reasonable to suppose, that the same wise and good principle which disposed the author of nature to make different kinds and orders of creatures, also disposed him to place creatures of like kinds in different situations, and that the same principle which disposed him to make different creatures of different moral capacities, also disposed him to place creatures of like moral capacities, in different religious situations, and even the same creatures, in different periods of their being. “Nor is there any thing shocking in this difference amongst men, with respect to religious advantages, or which, would seem to bear hard upon the moral administration in nature, if we would really keep in mind that every one shall be dealt equitably with. All shadow of injustice and indeed all harsh appearances, in this various economy of providence would be lost, if we would keep in mind that every merciful allowance shall be made, and no more be required of any one than what might have been equitably expected of him, from the circumstances in which he was placed; and not what might have been expected had he been placed in other circumstances: *i. e.* in scripture language, *that every man shall be accepted according to what he had, not according to what he had not.*” 2 Cor. viii. 12.*

An objection of a similar kind is that respecting language; *the continually progressive change to which the meaning of words is subject, the want of an universal language, which renders translations necessary, the errors to which translators are again subject, the mistakes of copyists and printers, together with the possibility*

* Bishop Butler's *Analogy of Religion*, p. 320, from which, and Dr. Hartley on *man*, the above arguments are chiefly taken.

sibility of wilful alteration, are of themselves evidences that human language, whether in speech or in print cannot be the vehicle of the word of God. This objection is founded upon the supposition that God will not adopt any mode of communication, but the most perfect one, and that we are able to judge which is most perfect. If God see fit to make use of language as the vehicle of his communications to men, shall man reject them, because he imagines that a better way might have been adopted? Shall we presume to dictate to our Creator, and say, either instruct me in my duty in such a manner as will require no pains on my part to discover thy will, or else leave me to myself? There may be reasons we cannot comprehend, which might induce the supreme Being, to throw some difficulties in our way, and if we have evidence of the genuineness of the books, it would be absurd to reject them, because language is liable to imperfections. Besides greater stress is laid upon these imperfections than they deserve. No man in his senses would reject any of the ancient Greek or Latin writers, and consider his works as of no use, on account of them, and yet there is not one of them, but is far more uncertain than the scriptures are, because there are fewer ancient copies of them, and a greater number of variations in proportion to the quantity, and the number of copies which have been compared. Nevertheless we are able, or imagine ourselves able to discover the general purport of their writings, and we give credit to their testimony; and even Mr. Paine himself, sceptical as he is, seems to entertain no doubt of the general propriety of the translations of them, since he not only admits that those translations are the mediums through which *almost all* the present knowledge of science has been derived, but that they have actually rendered the originals useless. Now if we can attain a competent knowledge of other ancient writings, and have attained *almost all* our scientific knowledge by means of such writings, why may we not also attain a competent knowledge of the bible? And if we be able to learn the contents of God's revelations by natural means, and the usual mode of communication from one man to another, why should we expect God to work a continual miracle to inform us of them? Never were books handed down from ancient times so well authenticated as they have been, and shall we reject them, because we see that language has its imperfections?

But

But you may say, though men of learning be able by their knowledge of the ancient languages, and the time they have for investigation, to ascertain the faithfulness of a translation, and find out the meaning of scripture, how are the poor and illiterate to judge of the fidelity of a translation, and to know whether they are imposed upon or not? This question is often put, and with apparent dissatisfaction; but might it not as well be asked, how comes it that there are any poor and illiterate at all? Why is not every man in circumstances to arrive at an equal degree of knowledge with his neighbour? I can only say, so it has seemed good to the all wise disposer of events, and therefore we cannot reasonably doubt that it will finally be productive of good. In the mean time, such persons may attain sufficient knowledge for their state, by information from men of learning and integrity, and by observing that persons who differ most widely in their sentiments, and are competent judges, agree in admitting the general fidelity of a translation, though they may differ about a few passages; and it is a circumstance much in their favour, that all the different translations agree in the most material points, those particularly which relate to moral conduct, and the necessity of acting well in this world, that we may attain happiness in the next. Man without diligent search cannot attain an adequate knowledge of many of the most ordinary operations of art; and still more industry is necessary to penetrate those of nature. We cannot therefore expect to find revelation free from all difficulties, and we are exhorted **TO SEEK**, with a promise **THAT WE SHALL FIND**. This necessity for search, is probably of the greatest use to us; but Mr. Laine would needs have *ignorance to be the mother of devotion*, and the religion of the illiterate, the effect of inspiration!

The following passage from Archdeacon Paley's late work on the evidences of Christianity, will confirm and illustrate the reasoning made use of, in answer to the two last objections and to some others. "Of a revelation which
 " came from God, the proof, it has been said, would in all
 " ages be so publick and manifest, that no part of the human
 " species would remain ignorant of it, no understanding could
 " fail of being convinced by it. The advocates of Christianity do not pretend, that the evidence of their religion
 " possesses these qualities. They do not deny, that we can
 " conceive it to be within the compass of divine power, to
 " have

“ have communicated to the world a higher degree of assu-
 “ rance, and to have given to his communication a stronger
 “ and more extensive influence. For any thing we are able
 “ to discern, God *could* have so formed men, as to have
 “ perceived the truths of religion intuitively ; or to have
 “ carried on a communication with the other world, whilst
 “ they lived in this ; or to have seen the individuals of the
 “ species, instead of dying, pass to heaven by a sensible trans-
 “ lation. He could have presented a separate miracle to each
 “ man’s senses. He could have established a standing mira-
 “ cle. He could have caused miracles to be wrought in every
 “ different age and country. These, and many more me-
 “ thods which we may imagine, if we once give loose to our
 “ imaginations, are, so far as we can judge, all practicable.
 “ The question therefore is not, whether Christianity pos-
 “ sesses the highest possible degree of evidence, but whether
 “ the not having more evidence, be a sufficient reason for
 “ rejecting that which we have. Now there appears to be no
 “ fairer method of judging, concerning any dispensation which
 “ is alledged to come from God, when a question is made
 “ whether such dispensation could come from God or not,
 “ than by comparing it with other things, which are acknow-
 “ ledged to proceed from the same council, and to be pro-
 “ duced by the same agency. If the dispensation in question,
 “ labour under no other defects than what apparently belong
 “ to other dispensations, these seeming defects do not justify
 “ us, in setting aside the proofs which are offered of its au-
 “ thenticity, if they be otherwise entitled to credit. Through-
 “ out that order, then, of nature, of which God is the author,
 “ what we find is a system of *beneficence*, but we are seldom
 “ or ever able to make out a system of *optimism*. I mean
 “ that there are few cases in which, if we permit ourselves
 “ to range in possibilities, we cannot suppose something more
 “ perfect, and more unobjectionable, than what we see. The
 “ rain which descends from heaven, is confessedly amongst
 “ the contrivances of the Creator, for the sustentation of the
 “ animals, and vegetables which subsist upon the surface of
 “ the earth. Yet how partially and irregularly is it supplied ?
 “ How much of it falls upon the sea where it can be of no
 “ use, how often is it wanted when it would be of the great-
 “ est ? What tracts of continent are rendered deserts by the
 “ scarcity of it ? Or not to speak of extreme cases, how
 F “ much,

“ much, sometimes, do inhabited countries suffer by its de-
 “ ficiency or delay ? We could imagine, if to imagine were
 “ our business, the matter to be otherwise regulated. We
 “ could imagine showers to fall, just where and when they
 “ would do good ; always seasonable, every where sufficient,
 “ so distributed as not to leave a field upon the face of the
 “ globe scorched by drought, or even a plant withering for
 “ the lack of moisture. Yet does the difference between the
 “ real case and the imagined case, or the seeming inferiority
 “ of the one to the other, authorise us to say, that the pre-
 “ sent disposition of the atmosphere is not amongst the pro-
 “ ductions, or the designs of the Deity ? Does it check the
 “ inference which we draw from the confessed beneficence of
 “ the provision ? or does it make us cease to admire the con-
 “ trivance ?—The observation which we have exemplified in
 “ the single instance of the rain of heaven, may be repeated
 “ concerning most of the appearances of nature : and the true
 “ conclusion to which it leads is this, that to enquire what the
 “ Deity might have done, could have done, or as we some-
 “ times presume to speak, ought to have done, and to build
 “ any propositions upon such enquiries against evidence of facts,
 “ is wholly unwarrantable. It is a mode of reasoning which will
 “ not do in natural history, which will not do in natural religion,
 “ which cannot therefore be applied with safety to revelation.
 “ It may have some foundation in certain speculative ideas of
 “ the divine attributes ; but it has none in experience, or in
 “ analogy. The general character of the works of nature is,
 “ on the one hand, goodness both in design and effect ; and
 “ on the other hand, a liability to difficulty, and to objections,
 “ if such objections be allowed, by reason of seeming incom-
 “ pleteness, or uncertainty in attaining their end. Christiani-
 “ tity participates of this character. The true similitude be-
 “ tween nature and revelation consists in this ; that they each
 “ bear strong marks of their original ; that they each also bear
 “ appearances of irregularity and defect. A system of strict
 “ optimism, may nevertheless be the real system in both ca-
 “ ses. But what I contend is, that the proof is hidden from
 “ us ; that we ought not to expect to perceive that in revela-
 “ tion, which we hardly perceive in any thing ; that benefi-
 “ cence of which we *can* judge, ought to satisfy us ; that opti-
 “ mism, of which we cannot judge, ought not to be sought af-
 “ ter. We can judge of beneficence, because it depends upon
 “ effects

“ effects which we experience, and upon the relation between
 “ the means which we see acting, and the ends which we see
 “ produced. We cannot judge of optimism, because it ne-
 “ cessarily implies a comparison of that which is tried, with
 “ that which is not tried ; of consequences which we see, with
 “ others which we imagine ; and concerning many of which,
 “ it is more than probable we know nothing ; concerning
 “ some that we have no notion.

“ If Christianity be compared with the state and progress
 “ of natural religion, the argument of the objectors will gain
 “ nothing by the comparison. I remember hearing an unbe-
 “ liever say, that, if God had given a revelation, he would
 “ have written it in the skies. Are the truths of natural
 “ religion written in the skies, or in a language which every
 “ one reads ? or is this the case with the most useful arts, or
 “ the most necessary sciences of human life ? An Otaheitean
 “ or an Esquimaux knows nothing of Christianity ; does he
 “ know more of the principles of deism or morality ? which,
 “ notwithstanding his ignorance, are neither untrue, nor un-
 “ important, nor uncertain. The existence of the Deity is
 “ left to be collected from observations, which every man does
 “ not make, which every man, perhaps, is not capable of
 “ making. Can it be argued, that God does not exist, be-
 “ cause, if he did, he would let us see him, or discover
 “ himself to mankind by proofs, which no inadvertency could
 “ miss—no prejudice withstand ?”

LETTER VI.

On the nature of the Evidence of Christianity.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

HAVING now, I hope, sufficiently cleared the way for
 the discussion of the evidences of Christianity, it may be useful
 to enquire what kind of evidence we have of the truth of a re-

velation.* And here I would observe, that a revelation has three different stages ; first, the *immediate* communication of it from God to the person whom he chooses to employ as his messenger : next, the communication of it by the person so receiving it to those to whom he is sent, and whom he has an opportunity of addressing ; and lastly, the communication of it by verbal or written accounts to persons living in distant countries, or in future generations. The evidence of the first of these is *intuitive*, and certainly brings the fullest conviction to the mind of the person receiving it. But, though so convincing to himself, it will not be so to others, nor will his bare assertion that it is so, authorise belief. It is not impossible but he may pretend to such a communication without having actually received it ; or a heated imagination may impose the dreams of his fancy upon him as realities. If God then designed to make any communication of his will to his creatures, and thought fit to employ a certain person as his instrument in doing so, we may reasonably conclude, that he would in some manner or other enable this person to prove that he was a divine messenger, and consequently, if it were antecedently probable that God would make such a revelation, it would be also probable that he would use means to enforce attention to his messenger. What then, it may be asked, are the best means of confirming such a mission ? This is a question I acknowledge myself unable to answer, for I have not the vanity to imagine, that by any chain of reasoning, I can with certainty discern what would be for the best, or decide that *any mode of evidence* is or is not *consistent*, or worthy the Almighty to make use of. It is the pride, perhaps I should call it the weakness, of human reason, to say what God ought, or ought not to do. Reason is a most valuable gift, but let it not be misapplied ; let us use it to judge of the truth of a revelation proposed

* I have already had occasion to notice Mr. Paine's using the word *revelation* in a confined and unusual sense, whilst he seems to draw general conclusions respecting it, a circumstance which may occasion some confusion to his readers. Whether he meant this or not, I pretend not to decide, but one who has been so severe on the apostle Paul, for what he calls a *quibble* on the words *death* and *Adam*, and who has disrespectfully called Christianity, *a religion interlarded with quibble, falterfuge, and pun*, ought to have been more exact in the use of words than Mr. Paine appears to have been. Perhaps it is not a precept of Deism, TO CAST THE BEAM OUT OF OUR OWN EYE, BEFORE
 WE PULL THE MOTE OUT OF A BROTHER'S EYE.

proposed to us, and of the sufficiency of the evidence; but let us not presumptuously undertake to judge the ways of the Almighty. These persons by whom God is represented to have given the Jewish and Christian revelations, are said to have wrought miracles, and to have appealed to these miracles, and to the fulfilment of prophecies, as proofs that they were really commissioned by God. The communications which they are said to have made, and the account of these miracles which they wrought, have been handed down to our times by means of written records. It is our part to enquire whether these writings are to be depended upon. And if it should appear that they do contain an account of what Moses and Christ preached, and we have reason to believe that *they* were teachers sent from God, then these writings are to all intents and purposes a divine *revelation*, since they convey to us a discovery of what God taught by them, as well as a narration of the interesting facts which related to their ministry. Now whether Moses and Christ really lived, and delivered what is ascribed to them; whether the books we have were really written by the persons who are said to have written them; and, whether these persons had proper means of information: whether in short, the facts recorded in them are true or false; these questions can only be decided in the same way that questions relative to remote events must always be decided, viz. by *testimony*. This, it is true, Mr. Paine invensively calls *hearsay* evidence; but it is, nevertheless, *that* to which mankind have agreed to give the fullest credit. And they have been taught to do so both by reason and experience. For instance, would not that man be accounted a sceptick, whom no evidence could satisfy, that should at this day scruple to admit the reality of the Norman conquest, or the assassination of Julius Cæsar? And if in either case he should talk of *hearsay* evidence, would it not be regarded as a mark of great weakness and even absurdity? With respect to Christianity then, I trust to be able to convince you that the testimonies in its favour, amount to the highest degree of *historical evidence*, and that amongst all the facts recorded in the annals of the world, there are none in which a greater number of authenticating circumstances meet, than in those facts which form the ground-work of the Christian religion. There are then two kinds of evidence to which we appeal, to supernatural facts, viz. *miracles* and *prophecy*, in proof that the Christian religion

religion is a divine revelation ; and to historical evidence in proof that those facts really took place.

The questions therefore at issue, between Mr. Paine and the advocates of Christianity, (and which it is my intention to consider in their order) are the following :

Is there sufficient evidence from testimony to prove that Christianity was professed upwards of seventeen hundred years ago ; that Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, was the founder of it ; that the original professors of it underwent many sufferings, solely in consequence of their belief in it, and that they submitted from the same motives to new rules of conduct ?

Is there sufficient evidence to prove the genuineness of the books of the new testament, and their having been written by the persons whose names they bear ?

Are miracles credible proofs of a divine mission ? And have we sufficient evidence that they were wrought by Jesus Christ and his apostles in confirmation of his having been sent by God ?

Is there sufficient reason for believing in the divine mission of Moses, and the genuineness of the books of the old testament ?

Can there be such a thing as prophecy ? And in what circumstances may we regard prophecies as proofs of a divine mission ? Have we any evidence from prophecies relating to Christ, or delivered by him of the truth of Christianity ?

Do the prophecies recorded in the scriptures relating to any other circumstances tend to confirm the truth of revelation ?

Is there evidence of a like nature to prove, that Mahomet was a prophet sent from God ? Or are we able to discover strong marks of imposture, and to perceive a material difference between the evidences of his religion, and that of Christ ?

L E T T E R

LETTER VII.

*On the Evidence for the principal
Facts.*

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THE first subject of enquiry to which I shall request your attention is this; have we sufficient evidence from testimony, to prove that Christianity was professed upwards of seventeen hundred years ago; that one Jesus of Nazareth, called also Christ, who was crucified at Jerusalem in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, was the founder of it; that the original professors of it underwent many sufferings, solely in consequence of their belief in it, and that they submitted from the same motive to new rules of conduct? Such of you as have read Mr. Paine's work, will recollect that he has admitted the *existence and crucifixion of such a person as Jesus Christ, to be within the limits of probability*; and that he has acknowledged the excellency of his character, and moral doctrine; he does not however give any reason from testimony, for believing part and rejecting the rest, and indeed, if I may judge from his work, there seems to be so much fancy and caprice, and so little judgment both in what he admits and rejects, notwithstanding some acute remarks on particular circumstances, that I shall make little or no use of his concessions.

The Christian religion does now exist, and prevails in almost all Europe, and in some parts of Asia, Africa, and America, and there must have been some adequate cause for this existence. We might therefore, if inclined to shrink from the enquiry, call upon Mr. Paine, or other unbelievers, to account for present appearances in a satisfactory manner, and show that different circumstances from what we assert, were the cause of them. This is seldom even attempted, perhaps from a consciousness that it could not be successfully executed. It is a much easier task to make witty remarks on the story of Jonah, or Samson, and to assert (without any proof) that the books of scripture are forgeries, that the whole is an imposture, and
that

that we should do much better without it. Such assertions do not require much room, and as care is taken to render the books as entertaining as possible, they are read with avidity, and produce their pernicious effect, whilst the dry, sober appeal to reason and facts which the defender of Christianity adopts, is thrown by neglected. I could without apprehension rest the truth of Christianity on this, that the present state of it in the world cannot be accounted for, without granting the leading facts in the Evangelick history; but as I do not choose to imitate Mr. Paine in trusting to assertions, I shall proceed with the evidence. It has been shown by Archdeacon Paley in a very ingenious manner, in a work which I cannot too strongly recommend to the perusal of all who can procure it, “ that a man left to himself, without any more information, “ than a knowledge of the existence of the religion, of the ge- “ neral story upon which it is founded, and that no act of pow- “ er, force, or authority, was concerned in its first success, “ would conclude from the very nature and exigency of the “ case, that the author of the religion, during his life, and his “ immediate disciples after his death, exerted themselves in “ spreading and publishing the institution throughout the coun- “ try in which it began, and into which it was first carried; “ that in the prosecution of this purpose, they underwent the “ labours and troubles, which we observe the propagators of “ new sects to undergo; that the attempt must necessarily “ have also been in a high degree dangerous; that from the “ subject of the mission, compared with the fixed opinions and “ prejudices of those to whom the missionaries were to ad- “ dress themselves, they could hardly fail of encountering “ strong and frequent opposition; that, by the hand of go- “ vernment, as well as from the sudden fury and unbridled “ licence of the people, they would oftentimes experience “ injurious, and cruel treatment; that at any rate, they must “ have always had so much to fear for their personal safety, “ as to have passed their lives in a state of constant peril and “ anxiety; and lastly, that their mode of life and conduct, “ visibly at least, corresponded with the institution which “ they delivered, and so far, was both new, and required “ continual self-denial.”* The arguments by which these
very

* “View of the evidences of Christianity.” Part 1. Chap. 1.—Vol. 1, page 20, 46.

very reasonable conclusions are supported, are too long to be introduced here, but the consideration of them may nevertheless be of some use. The testimony to the facts, I wish to prove, is of three kinds, that of the Heathen and Jewish writers, that of the writers of the books of the New Testament, and that of early Christian writers. I shall begin with the first, because being that of men who were enemies, or at least, not friends to Christianity, it is not liable to suspicion. The first Heathen writer I shall produce is Tacitus. Tacitus, as it may be necessary to inform some of you, was a Roman who lived in the first century, and filled the first magistracy under the emperor in the year 97, that is about seventy years after the death of Christ. Pliny a contemporary, whom we shall have occasion to mention, speaks of him with the greatest respect, and his credit has never been impeached. This Tacitus wrote two principal works, one called *Annals*, giving an account of events, beginning with Tiberius, and ending with the death of Nero; and a *history* beginning with Galba and ending at the death of Domitian; writings, which as has been often observed, have gained him more honour than all his dignities.

This historian speaking of the fire which happened at Rome in the tenth year of Nero, and about thirty years after the death of Christ, and of the suspicions which were entertained that the emperor himself was concerned in causing it, says,
 “ But neither these exertions, nor his largesses to the people,
 “ nor his offerings to the Gods, did away the infamous im-
 “ putation under which Nero lay, of having ordered the
 “ city to be set on fire. To put an end therefore to this re-
 “ port, he laid the guilt, and inflicted the most cruel punish-
 “ ment upon a set of people, who were held in abhorrence
 “ for their crimes, and called, by the vulgar, Christians. The
 “ founder of that name was Christ, who suffered death in the
 “ reign of Tiberius, under his procurator, Pontius Pilate.
 “ This pernicious superstition, thus checked for a while
 “ broke out again, and spread not only over Judea, where
 “ the evil originated, but through Rome also, whither every
 “ thing bad upon earth finds its way and is practised. Some
 “ who confessed their sect were first seized, and afterwards
 “ by their information a vast multitude were apprehended,
 “ who were convicted, not so much of the crime of burning
 “ Rome, as of hatred to mankind. Their sufferings at their
 “ execution

“ execution, were aggravated by insult and mockery, for
 “ some were disguised in the skins of wild beasts, and wor-
 “ ried to death by dogs—some were crucified—others wrapt
 “ in pitched shirts, (as we learn from another source) were
 “ set on fire when the day closed, that they might serve as
 “ lights to illuminate the night. Nero lent his own gardens
 “ for these executions; and exhibited at the same time a
 “ mock Circensian entertainment, being a spectator of the
 “ whole in the dress of a charioteer, sometimes mingling with
 “ the crowd on foot, and sometimes viewing the sight from
 “ his car. This conduct made the sufferers pitied, and
 “ though they were criminals, and deserving the severest pu-
 “ nishment, yet they were considered as sacrificed, not so
 “ much out of a regard to the publick good, as to gratify the
 “ cruelty of one man.” Such of you as choose, may read this
 in the original, or in Mr. Murphy’s excellent translation,
 in the forty-fourth chapter of the fifteenth book of the *Annals*.
 This passage proves beyond the possibility of dispute, that at
 the very period mentioned in the gospel history, there was a
 very extraordinary person in Judea, known by the appellation
 of Christ, that he was put to death by Pontius Pilate, the Ro-
 man governor of Judea: that from him the Christians took
 their name: that in Judea, where it had its rise, it spread,
 notwithstanding the ignominious death of the founder, and the
 opposition it met with: that it made its way to Rome, the
 capital of the empire, situated at a great distance; and that
 within thirty-four years from the death of the author, there
 was in that city a great multitude of Christians: and it also
 appears that the professors of this religion were reproached and
 hated, and underwent many and grievous sufferings. From
 the fact of the number of Christians in Rome, Archdeacon
 Paley observes, the two following inferences may be fairly
 drawn; “ first, that if, in the space of thirty-four years from
 “ its commencement, the religion had spread throughout
 “ Judea, had extended itself to Rome, and there had num-
 “ bered a great multitude of converts, the original teachers
 “ and missionaries of the institution could not have been idle;
 “ secondly, that when the author of the undertaking was put
 “ to death as a malefactor for his attempt, the endeavours of
 “ his followers to establish his religion, in the same country,
 “ amongst the same people, and in the same age, could not
 “ but be attended with danger.” As to what Tacitus says
 against

against the Christians, it must be remembered that he was attached to the idolatrous worship established at Rome, and thought any neglect of the gods, or innovation with respect to the prevailing system, criminal and dangerous to the state; he brings no specifick charge against them, and from the severity of their punishment moving compassion, it may be inferred, that they were not such monsters of wickedness as he represents them.* Be this as it may, it is very plain the profession of Christianity was neither honourable, nor profitable at Rome. And while this passage of Tacitus is in your thoughts, I would ask you what probability there is of men's having borne such cruelties, with the sole view of mending the Heathen mythology by a *pious fraud*? For Mr. Paine is willing to allow, that the first preachers had good intentions.—Much is talked about our experience.—Now does our experience warrant us to suppose, that men have so much disinterested benevolence, as to endure such tortures for adhering

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to

* That Tacitus should speak of Christianity in reproachful terms is not a disgrace but an honour. He reproaches the Jews for their worship of *one God*, even whilst he describes that worship in terms so beautiful and striking, that it is difficult to conceive how he could avoid being charmed with his own sketch, or feeling that the religion he could paint so ably, was infinitely superior to his own. "The Jews" says he (History Book v. Chap 5.) "acknowledge but *one Deity*, and they represent him only to their minds. They deem those profane who make images of the Gods of perishable materials in the human form. They regard only that all-governing, eternal Being who is equally incapable of dissolution or change. Of course they have no images in their cities, much less in their temples. They never gave any such mark of flattery to their kings. They have withheld this honour even from the Cæsars." Surely such a religion as this deserved some respect from the philosophical historian who could thus describe it. But no;—Tacitus with all his acuteness, saw no rationality in this system of belief—no merit in that steady attachment to it, which dared the resentment of the masters of the world. On the contrary he pronounces the professors of this religion to be a people averse from religion and devoted to superstition. (Chap. 19.) And yet Tacitus had Mr. *Paine's scripture*. The volume of Creation lay open before him—nay more, he knew the theory of '*true theology*' and could do it justice in description. But with all these aids, he perceived not its excellency. In his view, it had no beauty that he should desire it. Alas! then, will any man pretend to assert, that the works of nature are sufficient to teach the knowledge of the one true God *originally*—when they could not teach Tacitus, though already in possession of the *idea*, that it was preferable to the grossness of Polytheism! It appears too, that the agreement of the Christians with the Jews in the worship of one God, would alone have been sufficient to excite his dislike, and draw forth his censure.

to a lie, merely to impose one false system in the room of another, because they think it better? On such a supposition the early Christians were certainly men of a very different species from what we are.

An equally direct testimony with that of Tacitus, though less circumstantial, occurs in the works of Suetonius, a Roman of distinction, who was secretary to the emperor Adrian, and may be placed in the year 110. He also was intimate with Pliny the younger, and was recommended by him in strong terms to the emperor Trajan. Suetonius wrote *lives of the first twelve Cæsars*, and in several of them has mentioned circumstances, which Dr. Lardner considers as bearing testimony to the progress of Christianity. The only passage I shall notice is in the life of Nero, when describing the transactions of his reign, he says, "The Christians a set of men, of a new and mischievous (or magical) superstition, were punished." This, Dr. Lardner thinks, may include more extensive sufferings in the provinces, as well as the city, which we are told by Christian writers was the case.

The above testimonies, relate to what took place according to the course of nature, in the life-time probably of some of the apostles, and certainly in the life-time of those who were converted by the apostles, or in their time. And as the founder of the religion suffered death in the execution of his design, and as many of the first converts also suffered the greatest extremities, it is hardly credible, that those who came *between* viz. the companions of the author during his life, and teachers of his institution after his death, could carry on their undertaking with ease and safety.

The next Heathen writer, I shall mention, is Pliny the younger, a most accomplished man, and the favourite of the emperor Trajan, who advanced him to the first offices of the state. About the year 106, he went as governor to the province of Bithynia in Asia, from which place he wrote to the emperor concerning the Christians, and his letter, with the answer to it, are preserved in the collection of his letters, which have been translated by Mr. Melmoth. The two I allude to, are the 97th and 98th of the 10th book. These letters, prove three things: first, the number of Christians

in Bithynia and Pontus, in less than 80 years after the death of Christ. Secondly, they prove the bitterness of their persecutions, even under an emperor, and governor who were esteemed mild, and when there was no actual law existing against them, as appears from Pliny's ignorance how he should act, and the emperor's giving him a rule for his direction. Thirdly, Pliny's letter is a striking testimony to the morality of the early Christians, which from a person much prejudiced against them, is very much to their honour. I have inserted the letters in a note, that you may judge yourselves of the propriety of the above conclusions, and I have marked in *Italicks* the passages to which I have particularly referred.*

Epicætetus

PLINY TO THE EMPEROR TRAJAN.

* It is a rule, Sir, which I inviolably observe, to refer myself to you in all my doubts; for who is more capable of removing my scruples, or informing my ignorance? Having never been present at any trials concerning those who profess Christianity, I am unacquainted not only with the nature of their crimes, or the measure of their punishment, but how far it is proper to enter into an examination concerning them. Whether therefore any difference is usually made with respect to the ages of the guilty, or no distinction is to be observed between the young, and the adult; whether repentance intitles them to a pardon, or, if a man has been once a Christian, it avails nothing to desist from his error; whether the very profession of Christianity, unattended with any criminal act, or only the crimes themselves inherent in the profession are punishable; in all these points I am greatly doubtful. In the mean while the method I have observed towards those who have been brought before me as Christians, is this: *I interrogated them whether they were Christians; if they confessed I repeated the question twice again, adding threats at the same time; when if they still persevered, I ordered them to be immediately punished: for I was persuaded, whatever the nature of their opinions might be, a contumacious and inflexible obstinacy certainly deserved correction.* There were others also brought before me possessed with the same infatuation, but being citizens of Rome, I directed them to be carried thither. *But this crime spreading* (as is usually the case) *while it was actually under prosecution, several instances of the same nature occurred.* An information was presented to me, without any name subscribed, containing a charge *against several persons, who upon examination denied they were Christians, or had ever been so.* They repeated after me an invocation of the Gods, and offered religious rites with wine and frankincense before your statue, (which for the purpose I had ordered to be brought, together with those of the gods,) and even reviled the name of Christ: whereas there is no forcing, it is said, those who are really Christians, into a compliance with any of these articles. I thought proper therefore to discharge them. Some among those who were accused by a witness in person, *at first confessed themselves Christians, but immediately after denied it; while the rest owned indeed that they had been of that number formerly, but had now, (some above*
three,

Epiætetus the stoick philosopher, or his disciple Arrian, who both lived about this time, speaks of the constancy of the Christians, (or Galileans as he calls them, and as the emperor Julian afterwards called them) and ascribes it to madness or habit, as the emperor Marcus Aurelius, fifty years after, does to

three, others more, and a few above twenty years ago) *forsoke that error.* They all worshipped your statue and the images of the gods, throwing out imprecations at the same time against the name of Christ. They affirmed, *the whole of their guilt, or their error, was that they met on a certain stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves in a form of prayer to Christ, as to some god, binding themselves by a solemn oath, not for the purpose of any wicked design, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble, to eat in common a harmless meal.* From this custom, however, they desisted after the publication of my edict, by which, according to your orders, I forbade the meeting of any assemblies. After receiving this account I judged it so much the more necessary to endeavour to extort the real truth, by putting two female slaves to the torture, who were said to administer in their religious functions: but I could discover nothing more than an absurd and excessive superstition. I thought proper therefore to adjourn all farther proceedings in this affair, in order to consult with you. For it appears to be a matter highly deserving your consideration; more especially as great numbers must be involved in the danger of these persecutions, this enquiry having already extended, and being still likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and even of both sexes. For this contagious superstition is not confined to the cities only, but it has spread its infection among the country villages. Nevertheless it still seems possible to remedy this evil and restrain its progress. The temples, at least, which were once almost deserted, begin now to be frequented; and the sacred solemnities, after a long intermission, are again revived; while there is a general demand for the victims, which for some time past have met with but few purchasers. From hence it is easy to imagine, what numbers might be reclaimed from this error, if a pardon were granted to those who shall repent.

TRAJAN TO PLINY.

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in the proceedings against those Christians who were brought before you, is extremely proper; as it is not possible to lay down any fixed plan by which to act in all cases of this nature. But I would not have you officiously to enter into any enquiries concerning them. *If indeed they should be brought before you, and the crime is proved, they must be punished;* with the restriction however that where the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall make it evident that he is not, by invoking our gods, let him (notwithstanding any former suspicion) be pardoned upon his repentance. Informations without the accuser's name subscribed, ought not to be received in prosecutions of any sort, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the equity of my government.

Those who wish to see these remarkable letters fully considered will consult Dr. Lardner's works, vol. 7. p. 287—344.

to obstinacy, which prove their existence as a sect, and their sufferings. Celsus lived in the time of Marcus Aurelius, about the year 176, and wrote a work against Christianity entitled, "*The True Word*." This work, like many others, has been lost, but there is an answer to it existing, in which there are a great number of passages from it, whence it is evident, that Celsus was acquainted with the gospels, and acknowledged the facts, but accounted for them in a different manner, and turned them into ridicule. He attributed Christ's miracles to magick, which our modern unbelievers are too wise to believe in, and therefore they have resorted to the new ground of denying the facts. Lucian, part of whose works are known to almost every school-boy, was the friend and contemporary of Celsus, to whom he dedicated one of his tracts. This witty epicurean philosopher, who has so ludicrously exposed the Heathen superstition, also made the Christians objects of his ridicule, and by that means furnishes us with his testimony to many circumstances. In his life of Peregrinus he tells us, that the founder of the Christian religion was crucified in Palestine; that he was the great master of the Christians, and the first author of the principles received by them; that those men, called Christians, had peculiarly strong hopes of immortal life, and a great contempt for this world and its enjoyments: that they courageously endured many afflictions upon account of their principles, and sometimes surrendered themselves to sufferings: that honour and probity prevailed so much among them, that they trusted each other without security: that their master had earnestly recommended to all his followers mutual love; by which also they were much distinguished: and that their assiduity in relieving and comforting one another when under affliction, was known to all men.* In his Alexander, or Pseudomantis, he speaks of the Epicureans and Christians as being persecuted at the instigation of this remarkable impostor, *for having raised slanderous stories against him*. Galen, the famous physician who was the contemporary of Lucian, in his work on the pulse, has twice mentioned Christ; and in such a manner, as to induce some to think he was acquainted with the gospels.—The passages certainly

* These and many other remarks have been taken from Dr. Lardner's Jewish and Heathen testimonies, on whose known veracity and critical exactness I have relied in many quotations, having neither leisure or opportunity to consult the originals.

certainly prove at least the notoriety of the Christian religion at that time. There are many other Heathen writers whose testimony might be adduced, especially Porphyry and Julian, but having already taken up so much of your time in considering those of the two first centuries, I shall leave such of you as wish for further information, and have leisure for the pursuit, to consult the works of Dr. Lardner and others who have fully investigated the subject. I shall now conclude this letter, with remarking, that when we consider the very great probability of those who fully studied the subject becoming Christians, and of others who were moderate, holding their tongues lest they might bring themselves into difficulty, we have no reason to be at all dissatisfied with the evidences which have been adduced, as not sufficiently circumstantial, or favourable—on the contrary, you will no doubt agree with me in thinking that they are in their *quality* as much as could possibly be expected from *Heathens*, and in their *quantity* as conclusive as if they filled a volume.

LETTER VIII.

The same subject continued.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

HAVING in the preceding letter laid before you the earliest Heathen testimonies to the truth of the facts under consideration, I shall now proceed to the testimony of Josephus the famous Jewish historian, which must on many accounts be regarded as of great consequence. Josephus was of the race of the Jewish priests, and descended from a family which for a considerable time, had the supreme government of the Jewish nation. He was born about eight years after the death of Christ. He made such proficience in knowledge that at the age of fourteen, he was consulted by the principal men of the city about the right interpretation of things in the law. At nineteen he became a *Pharisee*, and entered upon the management of publick affairs : he went on an embassy to Nero, and was afterwards a distinguished general against the Romans, but being obliged to surrender himself, he got into the good graces

of

of Vespasian, and was patronised by him, and his sons Titus, and Domitian. Such a man must evidently have had the best information concerning Jewish transactions, both in his own times and those immediately preceding. This information he published in two works, *Jewish antiquities*, containing the history of the Jews from the creation to the 12th year of Nero, and a *history of the Jewish war in 7 books*; the publication of which may be set down about A. D. 76, within fifty years after the death of Christ. In the former of these works, there are three passages which demand attention. In the first (Antiquit B. xviii. C. 5. § 1. 2.) he mentions John the Baptist having been put to death by Herod, with other circumstances mentioned in scripture, and speaks of John "as a just man, " who had called upon the Jews to be baptised, and to practise virtue, exercising both justice towards men, and piety " towards God." The genuineness of this passage I cannot find has ever been questioned, and the connection between John's preaching and Christ's is so great, that such a testimony to the one, may at least be considered as an indirect evidence in favour of the other. In another passage (B. 20. C. 8.) he mentions " James, the brother of him who is called Christ, " being stoned to death." This however is doubtful, and not being equally important, I shall proceed to the most material one; it occurs in the 18th book, 3 chap. 3 section, and is as follows; " at that time lived Jesus, a wise man, if he may be " called a man; for he performed many wonderful works. " He was a teacher of such men as received the truth with " pleasure. He drew over to him many Jews and Gentiles. " This was the Christ. And when Pilate, at the instigation " of the chief men among us, had condemned him to the " cross, they who before had conceived an affection for him, " did not cease to adhere to him. For on the third day he " appeared to them alive again, the divine prophets having " foretold these, and many other wonderful things concern- " ing him. And the sect of the Christians, so called from " him, subsists to this time." The authenticity of this remarkable passage is disputed, and it has been deemed by some learned Christians, an interpolation. The arguments on each side are too long to mention, nor are they necessary for my present design. The passage is either genuine, or it is not. If it be genuine, it contains a direct testimony to the facts I wish to prove; but if not, which I am inclined to think most
H probable,

probable, in this case his silence is of little less importance than his testimony, as it almost equally serves to authenticate the truth of those facts upon which Christianity is founded. This may at first seem a strange assertion; but perhaps you will assent to it, when you consider that Josephus could not be ignorant of the existence of such a man as Christ, or of his having founded a sect which had made great progress in the world. These circumstances were too notorious for Josephus to be unacquainted with them. Did he then think them too inconsiderable to occupy a place in his history? We may conclude he did not from the following circumstances. 1st In his time, Christians were so numerous a society as to engage the attention of the Roman Emperors, who took very great pains to exterminate their opinions, and Tacitus and Suetonius who could not be so much interested as Josephus, considered the rise and establishment of Christianity as of sufficient magnitude to rank amongst the events, transmitted by them to posterity. 2^{dly} Josephus makes mention of three Jewish sects, though two of them had ceased to exist; he should not then have been silent with respect to the Christians who had increased in all the provinces, and even in the capital of the empire. 3^{dly} He has given a very full and accurate account of a great number of impostors, or heads of parties, which arose amongst the Jews, from the time of Augustus to the ruin of Jerusalem. Now Jesus founded a party much more considerable, and which occasioned much greater noise, than all those whom this author has mentioned. "These impostors," says the Abbé Bullet, "these ring-leaders, these men who had collected mobs, had no followers beyond the precincts of Judea: their partizans and adherents were soon dispersed, and at the time Josephus wrote, nothing but the bare remembrance of them remained. It was far different with the sect, the assemblies and community Christ had formed; it not only subsisted in the time of the historian, but was extended through every province of the empire, and flourished in the very capital. The sovereigns of the world exerted all their authority to suppress it. It deserved then to have been noticed by Josephus. How then, consistently with the laws of history, and the method which he had prescribed to himself, of recording every thing he knew, could he preserve an entire silence on this head? Let us try to solve this ænigma. Either this historian must have believed that all which the

"disciples

“ disciples of Jesus had said of their master was false, or else
 “ was true. If false, he could not have remained silent;
 “ every thing would have stimulated him to speak out on the
 “ occasion; the interest of virtue; zeal for his own religion,
 “ the foundations of which Christians had sapped by their im-
 “ postures; the love of his own nation, who were accused,
 “ and upbraided with having from a malignant and cruel jea-
 “ lously put to death the Messiah, the son of God. By ex-
 “ posing the impostures of the apostles, he would have over-
 “ whelmed with confusion the enemies of his own people;
 “ have ingratiated himself most effectually with his nation;
 “ conciliated the favour of those emperors, who persecuted
 “ the growing cause of Christianity; attracted the applauses
 “ of all who looked with horror on this new superstition;
 “ and undeceived the Christians themselves, whom the first
 “ disciples of Jesus had so miserably misled. Can any person
 “ for a moment believe, that a man able to expose so gross
 “ an imposture, and who had so many powerful inducements
 “ to do it, should, in spite of every incitement persevere in
 “ the most obstinate silence; especially, when so natural an
 “ occasion solicited him to speak? If false miracles were pro-
 “ pagated for the purpose of seducing the people of our days,
 “ with what zeal, with what ardour would our writers march
 “ forth to detect the imposture, and prevent the seduction!
 “ Should we not regard their silence, on such an occasion, as
 “ a criminal prevarication? It appears then indisputable,
 “ that if Josephus had believed the relations of the apostles
 “ concerning their master to have been false, he would have
 “ taken care to declare his conviction: but if he did not be-
 “ lieve them to be false, he must have known them to be
 “ true; and for fear of displeasing his nation, the Romans,
 “ and their emperors, held his peace.” * It may be observed,
 in confirmation of this argument, that such was the time-serv-
 ing and worldly disposition of Josephus, that he would neglect
 no opportunity of pleasing his own nation, or the Romans, nor
 can we suppose a regard for truth would have as much influ-
 ence upon him, as a regard to his own interest.† Whichsoever

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side

* See this argument of the Abbe Bullet's more at large in the ap-
 pendix to Dr. Kippis's life of Lardner, prefixed to his works.

† We have a most striking instance of this worldly wisdom of Jose-
 phus in his history of the Jewish war, book 6, chapter 5, where, after
 observing

side of the question then is taken, we may consider Josephus as serving to authenticate the truth of the facts on which Christianity is founded.

We now come to the testimony of the Jewish Talmudists, which, though of a later date than any hitherto produced, is of great importance, but as the consideration of it in detail, would too much enlarge this part of the work, I shall content myself with observing that the Talmuds which were written by Jewish Rabbis, one about A. D. 300, and the other about A. D. 500, and which are considered by the Jews as authentick bodies of national theology, contain some important acknowledgements with respect to the facts of Christianity; that *Jesus* is repeatedly mentioned in them, and several particulars given of his life and death, though with considerable misrepresentations; and what is more extraordinary, that they grant the power of working miracles having devolved to his followers.* Mutilated and distorted as the anecdotes are which they relate, and discoloured as they appear from having passed through the dark medium of tradition, rendered still darker by the malignant breath of calumny, still they

observing that what encouraged the Jews most in undertaking the war against the Romans, was an ambiguous oracle, which, says he, "was also found in their sacred books, that about that term *one from their country should become governor of the habitable globe*;" he adds, what he himself must have been conscious was as gross and as clumsy a misapplication as could have been conceived, "that *this oracle* certainly "denoted the government of Vespasian who was appointed Emperor "in Judea."

It is to be observed that Josephus here, first studies to make the prediction ambiguous, by expressing it in terms infinitely more general than those found in the scriptures, and having thus forced it to fit his purpose, he gives it an explanation, which the most uninformed of his countrymen could have proved to be equally false and absurd. Now does not this very particular throw the strongest light on Josephus's silence respecting our Saviour? Having once sacrificed the prophecies at the shrine of the Emperor, it was obviously incumbent on him to avoid a subject, which could not well have been discussed without the hazard of betraying the unfoundedness of his compliment. Could he have barely touched upon it and dispatched it in a few words, no doubt he would have done it—as his having attributed the Messiahship to the Emperor imposed a duty upon him, where it could safely be attempted, to overthrow a rival claim, and particularly a still existing and growing one. Does not then his entire silence show that, at least, he regarded it as a question of embarrassment and difficulty?

* For a full account of the evidence of the Talmudists, I would refer the inquisitive reader to Lardner, v. vii. p. 149. &c. Ed. London 1788.

they discover a foundation in facts of the same cast and character—if not the same essentially with those which the Evangelick writers have related. For why should the Jews have preserved those anecdotes—or why should the Talmudists have recorded them, if some such things had not actually occurred? Their malice to Christianity was inveterate, and the shortest and most effectual mode of exerting it would have been to have denied the alledged facts at once, and have charged the reporters of them with direct falsehood. This they evidently did, whenever they thought they could, and when they did not do so, it was clearly because they could not. They then had recourse to the only remaining method—to vilify and misrepresent those facts which they saw to be in themselves incontrovertible. And *the manner* in which the ancient Jews were accustomed to record facts, which, if truly represented would have made against themselves, will appear in the clearest point of view from a comparison of the account given of the siege of Jerusalem by the Talmudists, (which may also be found in Dr. Lardner's work at the place before cited) with the relation of the same event by Josephus. By making this comparison, the unprejudiced reader will see that as in spite of their distortions, they confirm by their substantial acknowledgements, the authenticity of the Jewish historian in his account of that memorable event; so precisely in the same way, by similar acknowledgements and in spite of similar distortions, they stand unwilling, but most conclusive witnesses in favour of the gospel. And it will then also appear how very ill-founded is the assertion of Mr. Paine, *that to cite the Jews as a proof of the truth of the story, is the same as if a man were to say, I will prove the truth of what I have told you, by producing the people who say it is false.*

I come now to the testimony of the writers of the books of the New Testament. Of the primitive condition of Christianity we can acquire only a distant and general view from Heathen writers. “It is in our own books that we must seek for a detail of the transaction. This is what we might naturally expect; for who would write a history of Christianity but a Christian? Who was likely to record the travels, sufferings, labours, or successes of the apostles but one of their own number, or of their followers?” Now these books contain an account of the facts we want to prove. We have four histories of Jesus Christ, which relate that in consequence
of

of his undertaking, he was put to death as a malefactor at Jerusalem in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, and under the procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, as mentioned by Tacitus. We are told that on the third day he rose from the dead, and appeared to his disciples. We have a history taking up the narrative from his death, and carrying on an account of the propagation of the religion, and of some of the most eminent persons engaged in it for a space of thirty years, and of its being preached even in Rome; points which are also confirmed by Tacitus—and we have also a collection of letters written by certain principal agents in the business, and in the midst of their concern and connection with it. And these writings not only contain an account of the origin of Christianity, and the sufferings of the first teachers of it, but they give it to us in every variety of form in which it can be conceived to appear; directly and indirectly, expressly and incidentally, by assertion, recital and allusion, by narrative of facts, and by arguments and discourses built upon these facts, either referring to them, or necessarily presupposing them. These books also testify to their adopting a new and peculiar course of private life. We are told of **THEIR CONTINUING WITH ONE ACCORD IN PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION, OF THEIR CONTINUING DAILY WITH ONE ACCORD IN THE TEMPLE, AND OF MANY BEING GATHERED TOGETHER PRAYING**, and we know from the same source that the rules of purity, and maxims of benevolence which they taught, tended directly to produce a system of conduct, and what is more difficult to preserve, a disposition of mind and a regulation of affections, different from any thing to which they had hitherto been accustomed, and different from what they would see in others. This change is often referred to in the letters of their teachers, and the testimony of Pliny, before mentioned tends to confirm it.

I have here taken the genuineness of these books for granted, but it shall be the business of the next letter to prove it from external and internal testimony; and I wish you particularly to remark that whatever opinion myself, or other Christians may entertain of inspiration, I have spoken of them hitherto, and intend to speak of them in these letters, only as the works of fallible men, but entitled to as much credit as the writings of Cæsar or Xenophon, or others describing events which came within their own knowledge. I well know that the
 inspiration

inspiration of the scriptures in any degree can only be proved from the scriptures themselves, and that it is therefore necessary in an argument of this nature, to prove the truth of the facts, without any reference to inspiration.

It remains for me to bring some evidence from the early Christian writers, to prove the above facts. I well know, that Mr. Paine has endeavoured to raise a great prejudice against them, as well as against the writers of scripture; he speaks of them as being themselves concerned in establishing this *pious fraud*, thus leading his readers to consider their testimony as of little weight. This appears a very uncandid way of arguing, for however unwilling we might be to pin our faith on theirs, and take for granted every thing they relate, yet we can conceive no reason why they should tell a lie, and afterwards suffer death, as many of them did, to prove that it was not one. The manner in which I shall consider their testimony, both now and in the next letter, to prove the genuineness of the scriptures, is this; we have books bearing the names of some of the immediate followers of the apostles, which have been mentioned by contemporaries, and succeeding writers, and of which early copies have been preserved, which books we may therefore conclude were written at an early period, and whether they were or were not composed by the very persons to whom they have been ascribed, must of necessity throw light upon circumstances, which had lately, or were then taking place. It is therefore fair, to produce these books as testimonies to such facts, as the existence and sufferings of Christians in their times, and the books which they had seen and read. To reject their testimony in such cases, is I conceive very unreasonable, and such conduct as would not be adopted in any other instance whatever; for it is not usual, I imagine, to reject the testimony of an original witness, merely on account of his attachment to that cause, which his work was designed to support. We receive his account with caution, but we do not reject it—and this will be the case, especially, when it was evidently not his professed object to prove the fact in question, but the mention of it is inadvertently introduced, when treating on another subject. After this remark I shall venture to produce their evidence, as strongly confirming that already given.

In an epistle bearing the name of *Barnabas*, the companion of Paul, which is generally esteemed genuine, and which, if not written by him, was certainly written in the first century, before the entire reduction of Judea; we have an account of the sufferings of Christ, his choice of apostles, and their number, his death and resurrection, with many other circumstances, agreeing in all material respects with the accounts in the gospels and acts.—In an epistle, generally ascribed to Clement, a hearer of Paul, although written for a purpose not necessarily connected with the Christian history, we have the resurrection of Christ, and the subsequent mission of the apostles, recorded in these satisfactory terms: “The apostles have preached to us from our Lord Jesus Christ, from God.—For having received their command, and being *thoroughly assured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ*, they went abroad publishing that the kingdom of God was at hand.” He mentions the humility, and yet the power of Christ, as also, his crucifixion. He speaks of Peter and Paul, as faithful and righteous pillars of the church, and mentions their labours and sufferings.—Hermas, a writer of nearly the same period, in a piece little connected with historical recitals, speaks of “those who have believed and suffered death for the name of Christ, and have endured with a ready mind, and have given up their lives with a ready heart.”—Ignatius who lived at Antioch in the year 107, and Polycarp, who lived at Smyrna about the same time, and is supposed to have known the apostle John, in epistles written for the purpose of exhorting their fellow Christians, mention the same facts, and it may be observed that both of them suffered martyrdom on account of their belief.—Papias of Hierapolis in Asia, A. D. 116.—Justin Martyr, who was originally an heathen philosopher, who afterwards presented an apology for Christianity, to the emperor Antoninus Pius about A. D. 140, and was a martyr.—Tatian, who was a man of learning, and a heretick, A. D. 172.—Irenæus, a disciple of Polycarp, who preached afterwards at Lyons in Gaul, and suffered martyrdom there, A. D. 178.—Athenagoras, who is styled an Athenian and a philosopher, and who presented an apology to the emperor Antoninus Pius.—Theophilus of Antioch, whose works show he was well acquainted with Greek literature, A. D. 181.—Clement of Alexandria in Egypt, A. D. 194.—and Tertullian of Carthage in Africa, also a man of great learning, who like all the rest, was originally an heathen, about 200.—All these and many others
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whom I omit for sake of brevity, bear their testimony to the existence of a sect of Christians in their days, of its being numerous, and having extended to many distant countries, of its being much persecuted, and of the good conduct of the disciples. —I may then, I think, assert that the principal parts of the account are recognized by a series of succeeding writers. In addition to these testimonies, I would observe, that we find no account of the origin of Christianity substantially different from that given in the scriptures; that there was an early and extensive prevalence of rites and institutions, which result from that account; and that this account bears, in its construction, proof that it is an account of facts which were known and believed at the time; I have already dwelled so long on this part of the subject, that I must content myself with barely mentioning these things, which I conceive are sufficient to support an assurance, that the story which we have now is, in its principal facts, the story which Christians had at the beginning. “For instance, I
 “make no doubt, for the reasons which have been stated, that
 “the resurrection of the founder of the religion, was always a
 “part of the Christian story. Nor can a doubt of this remain
 “upon the mind of any one, who reflects that the resurrection
 “is, in some form or other asserted, referred to, or assumed,
 “in every Christian writing, of every description which hath
 “come down to us. And if our evidence stopped here, we
 “should have a strong case to offer: for we should have to al-
 “ledge, that, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, a certain number
 “of persons set about an attempt of establishing a new reli-
 “gion in the world; in the prosecution of which purpose,
 “they *voluntarily* encountered great dangers, undertook great
 “labours, sustained great sufferings, all *for* a miraculous story
 “which they published wherever they came; and that the
 “resurrection of a dead man, whom during his life they had
 “followed, and accompanied, was a constant part of this
 “story. I know nothing in the above statement, which can
 “with any appearance of reason be disputed; and I know
 “nothing in the history of the human species similar to it.”

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LETTER IX.

*On the genuineness of the Books of
the New Testament.*

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

WHAT I propose to consider in the present letter is, whether there be sufficient evidence to prove the genuineness of the books of the new Testament, and their having been written by the persons whose names they bear. It may be proper in the first place, to mention Mr. Paine's objection. *We are told,* says he, *that these books are the word of God. It is therefore proper for us to know, who told us so, that we may know what credit to give to the report. The answer to this question is, that nobody can tell, except that we tell one another so. The case, however, historically appears to be as follows: when the church mythologists established their system, they collected all the writings they could find, and managed them as they pleased. It is a matter altogether of uncertainty to us, whether such of the writings as now appear under the name of the new Testament, are in the same state in which those collectors say they found them, or whether they added, altered, abridged, or dressed them up. Be this as it may, they decided by vote which of the books out of the collection they made, should be the word of God, and which should not. Had they acted otherwise, all the people since calling themselves Christians, had believed otherwise; for the belief of the one comes from the vote of the other. Who the people were who did all this, we know nothing of; they called themselves by the general name of the church; and this is all we know of the matter. After this, he says, that we have no other external evidence for believing them to be the word of God, and that is no evidence. On this passage I beg leave to observe, that Mr. Paine has confounded two different questions, first, whether these books are genuine, and written by the authors whose names they bear? and secondly, whether they contain a revelation from God, which I understand, by the word of God? These I shall separate, the first will be considered in the present letter, the other will be the general conclusion to be drawn at the close of the work. This confusion of distinct questions*

questions, is one thing which makes *The Age of Reason* likely to mislead, and difficult to answer. I must also contend, that Mr. Paine has not fairly stated the nature of the evidence; he speaks of *Christian mythologists*, as *managing these writings as they pleased*, and *voting some books to be the word of God, while they rejected others*, and he insinuates that they did this by caprice, or as it suited their sentiments. How far such assertions are warranted by facts, will appear from the evidence I shall produce in support of the genuineness of these books, and I must again intreat you to remember, that I do not *at present* contend for them as inspired, or as a *word of God*, but only as books written by one Matthew, &c. who were disciples of Jesus Christ, and preachers of his religion, whether that religion were true or false.

It is a very common mistake amongst Christians, and unbelievers in general take advantage of it, to consider the bible, or at least the new Testament, as one book, every part of which rests on the same evidence, and that all must be received or none; whereas the fact is, that it is a collection of different books, many of them by different writers, and it is no more fair to join them together in this manner, than it would be to infer, that the writings of Sallust and Cæsar must stand or fall together, or to conclude that Mr. Locke did not write the *essay on the human understanding*, because the *common place book to the bible*, generally attributed to him, is spurious.—We have not only evidence that they were written by different authors, but the variations in their accounts, as well as the striking difference in their style, and manner of writing prove it fully. I would observe then, that such was the situation of the writers to whom the four gospels are ascribed, that if any one of the four can be proved genuine, it is sufficient for the establishment of the general facts, and it serves, in effect, to authenticate the other three. The authors of all of them lived at the time and on the spot. Two of them were eye-witnesses of the facts, and ear witnesses of the discourses, and wrote from their own personal knowledge.—If then Matthew and John wrote the narratives (or *anecdotes*, for I have no objection to Mr. Paine's term) to which their name is prefixed, these narratives must either be true in their principal parts, or must be wilful and meditated falsehoods. Yet the writers who fabricated these falsehoods, if they be such, are of the number of

those, who unless the whole contexture of the Christian story be a dream, sacrificed their ease and safety in the cause, and for a purpose the most inconsistent that is possible with dishonest intentions. *They were villains for no end, but to teach honesty, and martyrs, without the least prospect of honour, or advantage.* The gospels ascribed to Mark and Luke, although not the narratives of eye-witnesses, are removed only one degree, having been written by contemporaries, who were companions of eye-witnesses, and received their accounts from them. If then the books are genuine, they contain those facts which the original preachers of the religion alledged, whether those facts be true or false. Supposing even one of these narratives to be genuine, we have the substance of what the apostles preached, from one of their own number, or at least from one who was not only their contemporary, but was associated with them in their ministry. But I would observe farther, that we should consider the *aggregate* evidence of these books, as well as their *separate* evidence. Now there is in the evangelick history an accumulation of testimony which belongs hardly to any other, but which our habitual mode of reading the scriptures sometimes causes us to overlook. When a passage is read out of an ancient Christian writer, which relates to the history of Christ, we are immediately sensible of the confirmation it brings to the scripture account. Now had it so happened that we had read or seen Matthew's gospel only, and knew nothing farther of Luke's gospel, than as we know now of the works of the early Fathers, viz. that such a writing was extant, and acknowledged, when on meeting with it and reading it, we found many facts recorded in it, that Matthew had recorded, and other facts of a similar nature added, we should consider it as additional evidence. The gospel of John would occasion a like sentiment; and even considering Mark's as an abridgement of the same history, made in that early period, it would be a valuable testimony. If we should likewise meet with a history taking up the story where the others left off, and continuing the narrative, the reality of the original story would be, in no small degree, established by the supplement.— If afterwards we should discover a number of letters written by some of the principal agents, concerning the business, and during the time they were engaged in it, assuming all along the truth of the original story, agitating the questions which arose out of it, pressing the obligations which resulted from it,

it, and giving advice and directions to those who acted upon it, I conceive in every one of these, we should find further support to the conclusion we had formed. Now let it be well observed, that whatever additional authentication we should feel in thus coming at the books of the New Testament in succession, and in observing the uniform correspondence between those we had met with last, and those we had been acquainted with before, the very same ought in all reason to arise from the exact agreement in point of facts, and harmony with respect to design, which appear amongst the different books as they now stand. For though for the convenience of Christians they were early collected into one volume, yet there was a time when they were distinct and separate. They were obviously written in different places, for the immediate instruction of different people, and not even at the same precise time. And if they were speedily sought out, and universally known in the Christian church, it was because the early believers were apprised of the full value of such authentick records; and because from the common interest they took in them, those who had them first in possession, were as prompt to communicate them to others, as those others were anxious to receive them. If then, on the whole, those books are genuine, we have not a naked or solitary testimony, but we have a *collection of proofs*. And if even after all, doubts should remain whether those books were actually written by the very persons whose names they bear (a point which, however, I am very far from conceding) still such a doubt would not necessarily destroy the evidence of the facts. For so long as it can be made appear that they were certainly written by some of the earliest disciples of Christianity, and were generally received by those societies which the apostles themselves had founded, as containing authentick accounts of the transactions on which their religion rested (a fact which is abundantly proved by the frequent references and quotations made by Christian writers from the earliest times, who though not always naming the authors of the evangelick books, have said enough to fix both their time and situation, and to evince the high and universal respect in which their writings were held) I say even under these circumstances, the books of the New Testament which we have now in our hands, must be considered as satisfactory documents both of the facts insisted on, and the doctrines inculcated by the apostles. “ Not forgetting, therefore, what credit is
“ due

“ due to the evangelick history, supposing any *one* of the four
 “ gospels to be genuine ; what credit is due to the gospels,
 “ even supposing nothing to be known concerning them, but
 “ that they were written by early disciples of the religion,
 “ and received with deference by early Christian churches ;
 “ more especially not forgetting what credit is due to the
 “ New Testament in its capacity of *cumulative* evidence ; I
 “ now proceed to state the proper and distinct proofs, which
 “ show not only the general value of these records, but their
 “ specifick authority, and the high probability there is, that
 “ they actually came from the persons whose names they
 “ bear.”

There are however a few preliminary reflections, which will
 lead us with more regularity to the propositions upon which the
 close and particular discussion of the subject depends. Of which
 nature are the following : first, we can produce a great number
 of ancient *manuscripts* found in many different countries, and
 in countries widely distant from each other, all of them written
 before the art of printing was known, some certainly seven
 or eight hundred years old, and some which have probably
 been preserved above a thousand. We have also many ancient
versions, or translations of these books, and some of them into
 languages which are not at present, nor for many ages have
 been, spoken in any part of the world. They are not then a
modern contrivance. The number of manuscripts so dispersed
 affords an argument, in some measure, to the *senses*, that the
 scriptures were formerly more read and sought after than any
 other books. It is observed also that they have suffered less
 injury from transcribers, than the works of any profane author
 of the same size and antiquity. Secondly, an argument of
 great weight with those, who, from their knowledge of the
 dead languages, are judges of the proofs upon which it is found-
 ed, and which is capable, through their testimony, of being
 addressed to every understanding, is that which arises from the
 style and language of the New Testament. It is such as might
 be expected from persons of the age, and in the situation of
 the apostles. It is the style neither of classical authors, nor
 of the ancient Christian fathers, but Greek coming from men
 of Hebrew origin ; abounding with Hebraic and Syriac idioms,
 such as would naturally be found in the writings of men, who
 used a language spoken indeed where they lived, but not the
 common

common dialect of the country. This happy peculiarity is a strong proof of the genuineness of these writings. Thirdly, if it had been an easy thing to have forged Christian writings, and to have obtained currency and reception to the forgeries, it is probable that we should have had many appearing in the name of Christ himself. No writings would have been received with so much avidity, and respect as these; consequently none afforded so great temptation to forgery. Thus I think that Mr. Paine's objection of our not having any thing said to be written by Christ himself, affords a strong proof of the genuineness of the books. Fourthly, If the ascriptions of the gospels to their respective authors had been arbitrary, or conjectural, the three first gospels would have been ascribed to more eminent men, as Peter, or James, or Paul: whereas there is hardly one of the apostles less noticed than Matthew, or of whom what is said is less calculated to magnify his character. Of Mark nothing is said in the gospels, and what is said of any person of that name in the acts, and epistles, bestows no praise or eminence upon him. The name of Luke is only mentioned three times very transiently in St. Paul's epistles. We may presume, therefore, that the writings were assigned to these authors upon proper knowledge and evidence, and not upon a voluntary choice of names. Fifthly, Christian writers and Christian churches appear to have soon arrived at a very general agreement upon the subject, and that without the interposition of any publick authority. When the difference of opinion, which prevailed, and prevails amongst Christians in other points, is considered, their concurrence in the canon of scripture is remarkable, and of great weight, especially as it seems to have been the result of private and free enquiry. We have no knowledge of any interference of ecclesiastical authority with respect to this question, before the council of Laodicea, in the year 363. Probably the decree of this council rather declared than regulated the publick judgment, or perhaps was merely the judgment of some neighbouring churches, as the council was attended only by about forty bishops of Lydia, and the adjoining countries. And we find numerous Christian writers, after this time, discussing the question, "what books were entitled to be received as scripture," with great freedom, upon proper grounds of evidence, and without any reference to the decision at Laodicea. This remark shows the futility of what Mr.

Paine

Paine has said about *voting* the books to be scripture. The substance however and strength of an argument, concerning the genuineness of ancient writings, is ancient testimony. This testimony I shall proceed to detail under different heads.

I. The historical books of the New Testament, meaning thereby the four gospels, and the acts of the apostles, are quoted, or alluded to, by a series of writers, beginning with those who were contemporary with the apostles, or who immediately followed them, and proceeding in close and regular succession from their time to the present.

“ This is the manner in which we prove the genuineness of all ancient writers, and it is the least liable to any practices of fraud, whilst it is not diminished by the lapse of ages. Bishop Burnett, in his history of his own times, inserts extracts from Lord Clarendon’s history. One such insertion, is a proof that Lord Clarendon’s history was extant, at the time when Bishop Burnet wrote ; that it had been read by Bishop Burnet, that it was received by Bishop Burnet as a work of Lord Clarendon’s, and regarded by him as an authentick account of the transactions, which it relates : and it will be a proof of these points, as long as the books exist.” Horace is a writer, the genuineness of whose works is never questioned, and why ? because a contemporary writer has mentioned his name as a poet, four or five writers in the next age have also mentioned him, and one of them has given a character of his writings, and the same testimony has been borne by a few succeeding writers. Knowing he wrote poems, we therefore admit those ascribed to him as genuine ; but the evidence would have been more perfect, had any of them quoted some passage from his works which was now to be found in them ; which however is not the case. These instances may point out the nature and value of the present argument. The testimonies to be produced under this head, are the following :

1. An epistle ascribed to Barnabas, purporting to have been written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, and during the calamities following it, which is quoted as Barnabas’s, by Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, by Origen, A. D. 230 ; and is mentioned as an ancient writing, bearing the name of
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Barnabas, by Eusebius, A. D. 315, and by Jerome A. D. 392. In this epistle words are quoted which can be found only in Matthew's gospel, and which occur twice in it :—and there are also many passages in which the sentiment is the same, as in Matthew's gospel, and in a few, the same words.

2. An epistle said to be written by Clement Bishop of Rome to the church of Corinth, and said by Dionysius Bishop of Corinth about the year 176, to have been usually read in that church from ancient times. In this epistle the writer quotes expressions as the real words of Christ, which are read as such in the gospels. He also alludes to Paul's epistles, and quotes the first to the Corinthians.

3. A book bearing the name of Hermas, who is mentioned by St. Paul, the antiquity of which is incontestible, being quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, Tertullian, A. D. 200, Origen, A. D. 230. This work contains tacit allusions to St. Matthew's, St. Luke's, and St. John's gospels, and also to the acts.

4. Ignatius, who is said to have become Bishop of Antioch about 37 years after Christ's ascension, and therefore, from his time, place, and station, probably had known and conversed with some of the apostles. Epistles of his are referred to by Polycarp his contemporary, and passages found in the epistles now extant under his name are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, by Origen, A. D. 230, and the occasion of writing them is given by Eusebius, and Jerome. In these epistles are undoubted allusions to the gospels of St. Matthew, and St. John; Paul is spoken of in terms of high respect, and his epistle to the Ephesians is quoted by name.

5. Polycarp had been taught by the apostles, and appointed Bishop of Smyrna, according to the testimony of Irenæus: we have but one undoubted epistle of his, and this, though a short one, contains near forty clear allusions to the books of the New Testament, which is strong evidence of the respect which Christians of that age bore to them. The books alluded to are the gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, and many of St. Paul's epistles.

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3. A book bearing the name of Hermas, who is mentioned by St. Paul, the antiquity of which is incontestible, being quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, Clement of Alexandria, A. D. 194, Tertullian, A. D. 200, Origen, A. D. 230. This work contains tacit allusions to St. Matthew's, St. Luke's, and St. John's gospels, and also to the acts.

4. Ignatius, who is said to have become Bishop of Antioch about 37 years after Christ's ascension, and therefore, from his time, place, and station, probably had known and conversed with some of the apostles. Epistles of his are referred to by Polycarp his contemporary, and passages found in the epistles now extant under his name are quoted by Irenæus, A. D. 178, by Origen, A. D. 230, and the occasion of writing them is given by Eusebius, and Jerome. In these epistles are undoubted allusions to the gospels of St. Matthew, and St. John; Paul is spoken of in terms of high respect, and his epistle to the Ephesians is quoted by name.

5. Polycarp had been taught by the apostles, and appointed Bishop of Smyrna, according to the testimony of Irenæus: we have but one undoubted epistle of his, and this, though a short one, contains near forty clear allusions to the books of the New Testament, which is strong evidence of the respect which Christians of that age bore to them. The books alluded to are the gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, and many of St. Paul's epistles.

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6. Papias,

6. Papias, a hearer of John, and companion of Polycarp, in a passage quoted by Eusebius from a work now lost, expressly ascribes the respective gospels to Matthew and Mark, not as a matter newly discovered, but as well known to all Christians.

7. Justin Martyr who lived about A. D. 140, quotes all the gospels, as *memoirs* composed by the apostles.

8. Not to notice many intermediate writers, Irenæus lived about A. D. 178. He has quoted the four gospels and acts, ascribing them to the persons whose names they bore, and declaring there were no more than four. These writers lived in countries very remote from each other; Clement flourished at Rome, Ignatius at Antioch, Polycarp at Smyrna, Justin in Syria, and Irenæus in France.

9. Clement of Alexandria in Egypt, about A. D. 194, a very voluminous writer, repeatedly quotes the four gospels by the names of the writers, and the acts as written by Luke.

10. Tertullian of Carthage in Africa, about A. D. 200, quotes all the books by name, and speaks of them as having been long received. It is observed, that there are more and larger quotations of the small volume of the New Testament in this one author, than of all the works of Cicero by writers of all characters for several ages.

11. Origen, an Egyptian, A. D. 230, who mentions that the four gospels are received without dispute by the whole church of God under heaven, and gives a history of their authors. The quotations in his works are so thickly sown, as to contain almost the whole text of the bible.

12. Cyprian Bishop of Carthage, A. D. 248, speaks of, and quotes all the gospels and the acts, many of Paul's epistles, and the first epistles of Peter and John.

13. Victorin Bishop of Pettau in Germany, A. D. 290, bears similar testimony.

14. Eusebius Bishop of Cæsaria, A. D. 315, composed an ecclesiastical history, and his testimony to the scriptures is that

that of a man, much conversant in the works of Christian authors written during the three first centuries, and who had read many which are now lost. For the sake of brevity, I have omitted many writers before Eusebius at different periods, supposing the testimony sufficiently strong, and for the same reason I shall not quote any after him, as their admission of the books will hardly be called in question. That so many men, at such a distance from each other, had conspired to cheat the world is too improbable a supposition for any one seriously to adopt.

II. When the scriptures are quoted, or alluded to, they are quoted with peculiar respect, as books of a peculiar kind, as possessing an authority which belonged to no other books, and as conclusive in all questions and controversies amongst Christians. Besides the general strain of reference and quotation, which uniformly and strongly indicates this distinction, Theophilus of Antioch, about A. D. 181, calls them the *holy scriptures*; Origen says, we must receive the *scriptures* as witnesses; Cyprian calls them the *fountain* to which men should recur to find the truth, if it has been shaken; the Arians in the 4th century, reject certain expressions *because they were not in scripture*; and Athanasius, their great antagonist, calls the books of the Old and New Testament the *fountain of salvation*; besides others to the like purport.

III. The scriptures were in very early times collected into a distinct volume; as appears from various evidence omitted for sake of brevity.

IV. Our present sacred writings were soon distinguished by appropriate names and titles of respect. They were called *holy scriptures*, by Polycarp, A. D. 108; the histories were called *gospels*, by Justin Martyr, A. D. 140; they were called *scriptures of the Lord*, by Dionysius, A. D. 170; and afterwards by different writers, *divine oracles*, *evangelick writings*, *sacred books*, *New Testament*, and other similar expressions, which are evidences of high and peculiar respect.

V. Our scriptures were publicly read and expounded in the religious assemblies of the early Christians. This may be proved from the evidence of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, Cyprian, and others.

VI. Commentaries were anciently written upon the scriptures; harmonies formed out of them; different copies carefully compared; and translations made of them into different languages. No greater proof can be given of the esteem in which they were held, than the industry bestowed upon them. And it should be observed, that their value consisted entirely in their genuineness and truth. It likewise shows, that they were ~~then~~ considered as ancient books; since men do not write comments upon publications of their own times. Now Tatian, a follower of Justin Martyr, and who flourished about the year 170, composed a harmony, or collation of the four gospels, which he called *Diateffaron*, i. e. the sum of the four; Pantænus, a learned man of Alexandria, about twenty years after Tatian, wrote many commentaries upon them; Clement of Alexandria wrote explications of many books of the Old and New Testament; Tertullian appeals from the authority of a later version to the *original Greek*; and many other eminent men in the third and fourth centuries employed themselves in explaining and enforcing them. Of the ancient versions of the New Testament, the Syriack is one of the most valuable. Syriack was the language of Palestine, when Christianity was first established there. And although the books of scripture were written in Greek, for the purpose of a more extended circulation than within the precincts of Judea, yet it is probable that they would soon be translated into the vulgar language of the country, where the religion first prevailed. Such a translation we have in that language, bearing many internal marks of high antiquity, used by the Christians in Syria, and which differs in nothing material from our own.

VII. Our scriptures were received by ancient Christians of different sects and persuasions, by many Hereticks as well as Catholics, and were usually appealed to in the controversies which arose in those days. In proof of this I shall mention Basilides, A. D. 120, or perhaps sooner, who rejected the Jewish institution, not as spurious, but as proceeding from a being inferior to the true God; and who advanced a scheme of theology widely different from the general doctrine of the Christian church, which was warmly opposed by early Christian writers; yet there is positive evidence of his having received the gospel of Matthew, and there is no sufficient proof that he rejected any of the other three; and it appears also, that he

wrote

wrote a very copious commentary upon the gospel. The Valentinians appeared about the same time. Heracleon, one of their sect, wrote commentaries on Luke and John, and Irenæus records, that they endeavoured to fetch arguments for their opinions from the evangelick and apostolick writings. The Carpocratians are charged with endeavouring to *pervert* a passage in Matthew, which positively proves that they received that gospel; and their adversaries do not charge them with rejecting any part of the New Testament. Noetus, Paul of Samosata, Sabellius, Marcellus, Photinus, the Novatians, Donatists, Manicheans, besides Artemon, the Audians, the Arians, and divers others, all received most or all the same books of the New Testament which the Catholics received, and agreed in a like respect for them, as written by the apostles, or their disciples and companions. Even Marcian, who rejected more, and appears to have been more violent than any other, admitted as much of St. Luke's gospel, as is necessary to authenticate the religion. But you may perhaps imagine (it is an objection which has been already urged to me) that we have no proof of what opinions the ancient Hereticks held, since their writings are not come down to us, and we can only judge of them through the medium of their adversaries. Were we speaking of the characters, or even the religious tenets of these men, there would be some force in this objection, because we know that adversaries are very apt to exaggerate and misrepresent, in their zeal to maintain their own opinions. But in the present case it can be of no force, for the Catholic writers could have had no inducement to say, that the Hereticks received books of scripture as genuine, which they really did not receive; besides, the evidence is chiefly of the *indirect* kind, arising from charges made in the heat of debate, which is the least liable to suspicion. A familiar illustration may represent better to you the force of this evidence. In the year 1688, a revolution took place in Great Britain, William the third became king in the stead of James the second, and a bill of rights was passed in favour of the people. References to this event, and the principles on which it was founded, occur frequently in the parliamentary debates of that, and succeeding reigns, and it is mentioned by some contemporary writers. At the distance of one hundred years, disputes arose about the principles on which this event was founded between Mr. Burke on one side, and Dr. Price, Mr. Mackintosh,

lost, &c. on the other ; and each appealed to the writings of that day, in proof of their respective arguments. Now suppose twelve or fifteen hundred years hence a doubt should arise whether there ever was a revolution and a bill of rights, it being suspected that the latter was a forgery of later times ; and suppose also, that by the lapse of time and prevalence of contrary opinions, we knew nothing of Dr. Price's work, except from its being mentioned in a general history, and from Mr. Burke's remarks on it, but that the work of Mr. Burke happened to be preserved ; let me ask you, in such a case, whether, though they might suspend their judgment about Dr. Price's character and principles, the people of that time would not be justified in considering the passages quoted by Mr. Burke, as proofs that the Doctor admitted the truth of the event, and the genuineness of the writings which gave an account of it. Such is the evidence we derive from the *answers* to these ancient writers whose works are lost.

VIII. Our historical scriptures were attacked by the early adversaries of Christianity, as containing the accounts upon which the religion was founded. About a hundred years after the publishing of the gospels, Celsus wrote a professed treatise against Christianity, and his testimony is therefore of importance. This work is lost ; but an answer to it, about fifty years after by Origen, remains. Origen appears to have given us the words of Celsus very faithfully where he professes to give them, and he makes very large quotations. From these it appears, that Celsus had read the books we now have, for he quotes passages from them, with a view to expose them. These books must have been very publick, to have attracted the notice of an enemy so early ; and it can hardly be supposed, that Origen, whose own writings show him to have been one of the fairest, purest minded men in the world, would have sat down to abuse the Christians, fabricate objections to the scriptures, and then attribute the whole to a well-known Heathen, merely that he himself might confute it, and thus give weight to the evidence for Christianity in future times. This is too absurd for any one to suppose, and yet, it is what the rejection of Celsus's testimony would lead us to. Porphyry, a writer against Christianity in the third century, also made objections to passages in these books, and considered them as the depositaries of the religion he attacked, as we learn from those who replied to him, for his work has also perished.

perished. The emperor Julian was another well-known writer against Christianity, about a century after Porphyry, and it appears that he also knew of, and admitted the genuineness of these books. On the whole then, when we consider the means of information which these persons had respecting the evangelick writings, and how much it would have served their purpose to have denied the truth of them at once, their concession, or rather their suffrage is extremely valuable.

IX. The four gospels, the acts of the apostles, thirteen epistles of Paul, the first epistle of John, and the first of Peter, were received without doubt by those who doubted concerning the other books, which are contained in our present canon. This shows, that the authenticity of their books was a subject of consideration and enquiry amongst the ancient Christians; and that, where there was cause of doubt, they did doubt; a circumstance which not only establishes, in the strongest manner possible, the genuineness of those books, which they never did dispute, but also implies the credibility of the remainder, in as much as they were added to the canon notwithstanding a disposition to question them, and after a severe examination of their title.

X. Formal catalogues of authentick scriptures were published; in all which, our present sacred histories were included.

XI. These propositions cannot be affirmed of any of the books stiled *apocryphal*; those I mean which, though they bear the names of apostolick men, have been deemed spurious, and of course not admitted in the New Testament canon. Nay, it is even certain, "that, besides our gospels and the acts of the apostles, no Christian history, claiming to be written by an apostle or apostolical man, is quoted within three hundred years after the birth of Christ, by any writer now extant, or known; or, if quoted, is not quoted with marks of censure and rejection." I copy this assertion from Archdeacon Paley, who made enquiry into it, and it is confirmed by the researches of Mr. Jones, and Dr. Lardner, men of great learning, who, in a manner, devoted their lives to the investigation of the credit due to ancient Christian writers, and whose critical skill rendered them as capable of judging, as their

their known integrity places them above all suspicion of willingly deceiving. To this I shall add, after the same author (from whom indeed the most, I may almost say the whole, of this letter has been abridged) that there is no evidence of any spurious, or apocryphal books whatever having existed in the first century of the Christian æra, in which century all our historical books are proved to have been extant; that when those apocryphal books did appear, they were not read in the churches of Christians; were not admitted into their volume; do not appear in their catalogues; were not noticed by their adversaries; were not alledged by different parties, as of authority in their controversies; were not the subjects amongst them, of commentaries, translations, or expositions; finally, besides the silence of three centuries, or evidence within that time of their rejection, they were, with a consent nearly universal, reprobated by Christian writers of succeeding ages. I shall add to what has been observed, that we may draw strong arguments of the genuineness of the scriptures, from the number of particular circumstances of time, place, persons, &c. mentioned in them; from the candour of the writers in relating their own faults, and those of their friends; and from their agreement with other histories, particularly that of Josephus.*

I have now, I think, brought sufficient evidence, to satisfy you that the books of the New Testament have every claim to credibility that external circumstances can give them, and that they may be fairly considered as containing the only satisfactory account of the origin, and the early progress of the Christian religion. I am therefore entitled to use these books, as containing the evidence of these persons to the general facts which have been mentioned; and I shall consider myself as having established that Christ was the founder of the sect, and was crucified; that his disciples said he rose from the dead, and also that he wrought miracles, that they were persecuted on account of their opinions, and that they led moral lives agreeable to the gospel in which they believed.—Whether the extraordinary facts told by them be true or false, is still to

* Amongst other works I would here refer the reader to Archbishop Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ* and Dr. Lardner's *Credibility*, part 1st.

to be considered; but I think myself authorized to assert, that if there were any forgery, or *pious fraud*, it was confined to the *first preachers*, and did not *knowingly* extend to the *second or third* before it was believed as true, which Mr. Paine supposes. That the writers I have mentioned, and the many others I could have mentioned, were concerned in the fraud, is a *libel* too unjust and unfounded to gain your attention.

LETTER X.

On Miracles.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

I COME now to the most important enquiry, namely, are miracles credible proofs of a divine mission, and have we sufficient evidence to prove that miracles were wrought by Christ and his apostles, in confirmation of Christ having been sent by God? The first question which presents itself is, what is a miracle? *Mankind*, says Mr. Paine, *have conceived to themselves certain laws, by which what they call nature is supposed to act*;—and what led them to conceive this? Their having observed certain effects uniformly to succeed certain causes, and certain events to certain previous circumstances; as for instance they observed that night regularly succeeded day, and day night; that in the life of man infancy was the first stage, that to infancy succeeded childhood; to childhood youth; to youth manhood, and old age; that death and dissolution finally took place, and that the grave was a *bourne from which no traveller returned*. They observed that a stone thrown into the air always fell to the ground, and that iron, or other heavy bodies, if plunged into water, sank. This regular succession of events was called the established course, and order of nature, the *secondary* causes of which, whether known or unknown, received the appellation of the *laws of nature*. Now *though the whole extent of those laws, and of what are commonly called the powers of nature* be not perfectly known even to the most skilful and philosophical enquirer, yet they are in some degree obvious even to the most superficial observer. The common experience of life will not permit a man to be

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ignorant that a person really dead never returns to life again. Nor is there any man so simple as to throw money into water in expectation of its swimming, or to think of trusting himself on the sea in expectation of being able to walk on it without sinking. That a heavy body sinks in a lighter one, and that what is once dead does not revive, are parts of the course of nature known to every one, and every one therefore can judge concerning a deviation from these parts of it, or any other in like manner coming under their observation. A miracle, then, is *something contrary to the operation and effect of those laws*; or, as it has been better defined, a deviation from the established course of nature, whether the deviation be known to us or not. Miracles may consist either in changing the constituent parts of natural substances, as if water were to be changed into wine: or they may consist in controuling the operations of nature, as, if fire should not consume; or in superceding the operations of natural causes, as for a man to speak suddenly a language before unknown to him. These are cases in which there can be no *legerdemain*, and they evidently fall under our definition of a miracle. It may be observed further, that every creature in the universe, as far as our observation extends, has a limited sphere of action, and it is reasonable to believe the same of all creatures however exalted in rank and dignity. Actions performed with ease by beings of one order cannot be performed without a miracle by beings of a different order, even though of superior rank in the creation. A bird can fly through the air, and, by the curious mechanism of its frame, can rise or sink at pleasure; whilst man, who is so much wiser, so much more exalted in the scale of being, would in vain attempt it. If then any being should at any time deviate from his proper sphere of action, this event would fall under the definition of a miracle, as for example, the appearance of an angel would be miraculous, because we know that to appear to men is not within the proper sphere of such beings. In like manner, speaking rationally would, in any other animal except man, be a miraculous event. Every sensible deviation from the *known* law and course of nature is then an evident miracle. I say from the *known* law, because however monstrous or extraordinary any event may appear, it cannot certainly be determined to be miraculous, till the course of nature is known. Mr. Paine has instanced a great number of things which might appear miraculous, such as the ascension
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of a man in an air-balloon, and others ; but extraordinary as these would at first appear, there was no known established course of nature to the contrary, and on further enquiry, they could be satisfactorily accounted for. What he says of the *elephant and the mite* is too trifling, I had almost said, too ridiculous to be noticed. And as to *his performances by slight of hand*, I conceive they might have been omitted without injuring his argument. Mr. Paine was writing against the miracles asserted by Christians to have been wrought in support of their religion ; unless, therefore, he could show that they could be accounted for by natural causes, or by mechanical and optical deceptions, or by slight of hand, he gained nothing. A man rising from the dead on the third day, a man ascending up into heaven, the curing violent disorders by a word, the speaking suddenly in unknown languages, these, and such like cannot be so accounted for, and these are asserted as facts by all Christians. The point then is plainly this—Did these facts take place or not ? if they did take place, then they must be confessed by all to be miracles : if not, then Christianity must be given up.

Having thus endeavoured to establish what is a miracle, namely, a sensible deviation from the *known* law and course of nature, I come next to observe, not only that God is *able* to work a miracle, which I imagine none of you will dispute, but also that miracles cannot be proved to be in all circumstances unworthy of his perfections. They involve no absolute contradiction, and therefore they are within the compass of omnipotence ; nor are they inconsistent with infinite wisdom, if circumstances occur which justify a divine interposition. They do not affect the immutability of God, for they might have been foreseen and intended from eternity, nor do they militate against infinite benevolence, if wrought to promote the good of his creatures. As to what Mr. Paine says, of its *being inconsistent to suppose the Almighty would make use of such means*, he founds it on his own supposition, that there is no proper criterion to judge of miracles, and therefore that the person performing them is liable to be esteemed an impostor, or the relater of them a liar, or the doctrines supported by them a fabulous invention. Now I imagine you will allow, that there are things which are evident miracles, and that raising a dead man to life is such a thing : we have then a criterion by which we may judge, namely, a contrariety to the *known* established

tablished course of nature ; and if it be possible for God to perform a miracle, concerning which there can be no doubt, it is also possible for him to give it such evidence as to induce his creatures to believe in it. Before I proceed any farther, it may be useful to observe, that miracles never can be performed without an immediate divine interposition. The laws of nature are indisputably the appointment of God ; at least none who believe in a God, as Mr. Paine himself professes to do, will dispute it ; it is therefore reasonable to conclude, that these laws cannot be suspended without his express commission and immediate authority. Nor have we any proper evidence of the truth of any miracles, unless it be those of the Jewish and Christian dispensations, which claim God as their author. All others have been satisfactorily shown by many writers, and particularly by the present bishop of Salisbury, Dr. Douglas, in his *Criterion*, to be trifling, destitute of rational intention, calculated for some unworthy purpose, related by incompetent witnesses, and uncredited by all but the ignorant and superstitious. God, who established the course of nature, is able to change or suspend it ; that is, he can work miracles, but these miracles, in themselves, will prove nothing more than the existence of a being capable of controuling the laws of nature. How then can they be brought in attestation of a doctrine ? Let us examine—if I were to see a miracle wrought ; if, for instance, I were to see a person, whom I knew to have been dead, brought to life again, I should wonder, and admire the power of the Almighty, who was thus able to counteract the laws I see universally established, but this is all the effect it would produce on me. Were, however, a person to make his appearance, to assert publickly that he was a teacher sent from God, and to appeal to a train of *clear and acknowledged* miracles, wrought in an open and publick manner, in attestation of his claim ; I should consider this to be a sufficient proof of the truth of his doctrine, and of his divine mission ; and I should do so, because no such miracles could be wrought, but by an immediate divine interposition ; and because a wise, true, and good being, as we have abundant proof that God is, would never suffer the laws of nature to be violated, or suspended in attestation of a falsehood ;—of course the doctrine so attested must be of divine original. We have then got thus far—there are cases in which miracles may be fully ascertained, and if fully ascertained, there are cases in which they will be *certain* proofs of the truth of a doctrine,

doctrine, or the divine mission of a prophet. But is it not improbable that God would enable any person to work such miracles? Not more so, than that he should communicate a revelation to mankind; for if he see sufficient reason for making such communication, there will be equal reason for using some means to convince them that it came from him; and what reason have we to say miracles are an improper means? or if God chuse to adopt that mode, shall we presume to reject it? Miracles either of knowledge or power, are the only conceivable means, by which a divine revelation may be confirmed, nor has Mr. Paine, nor any other objector to miracles, ever pretended to point out a better, but have gone on the supposition, that a revelation was not *necessary*, if they did not even strike at the *possibility* of it. Miracles have several advantages; they are well suited to revive the principles of natural religion, by proving the existence of a Being superior to the laws of nature, and capable of controuling its course; they are means of proof which are equally obvious and satisfactory to the learned and the ignorant, to the philosopher and the peasant; and being *facts*, they are proofs capable of being transmitted by testimony to distant ages and nations. I have had repeated occasion to remark the unfounded hypotheses which Mr. Paine has advanced; on the present subject, he argues that *miracles are improbable, because they would not answer any useful purpose, even if they were true*; for it is more difficult to obtain belief to a miracle, than to a principle evidently moral without any miracle. His reason is, because moral principle speaks universally for itself, whereas, a miracle can be but a thing of a moment, and seen but by a few, and after this depends on report. And in another place he says, *miracles imply a lameness or weakness in the doctrine that is preached, and it degrades the Almighty into the character of a showman, playing tricks to make the people stare and wonder*. The foundation of all this is, that men are capable, by reason alone, of attaining a knowledge of their duty, and that they have such a sense of morality, and are so ready to attend to it, that they require no stronger inducements than its own intrinsic excellence. Now that men have not employed their reason so well, but have required something more than the light of nature to instruct them, I have already endeavoured, and I hope successfully, to establish. If reason then is not all-sufficient, how does it degrade the Almighty to suspend or alter the laws he has established in nature,

ture, for the purpose of enforcing the useful knowledge which he communicates to his people? Or how does it imply any weakness in a doctrine, to have its divine origin confirmed by works which none could perform without divine aid, and which are calculated to rouse men from their lethargy, and render them attentive and submissive?

But Mr. Paine's grand objection is, that it is *equivocal evidence for the thing is not to depend upon the thing called a miracle, but upon the credit of the reporter, who says that he saw it.* If we see an account given of a miracle by the person who said he saw it, it raises a question in the mind very easily decided, which is, *Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie?* We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course, but we have good reason to believe, that millions of lies have been told in the same time. It is therefore at least millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie. The amount of this is, that no testimony whatever can make a miracle credible, because it is contrary to uniform and universal experience. We have known men tell lies, but we have never known nature go out of her course. This is Mr. Hume's objection, and it will be necessary to give it close attention. And in the first place I would remark, that to assert miracles are contrary to universal experience, is evidently begging the question, and assuming as proved the subject of the controversy. We say that miracles took place; it is replied, they never did; and why? Because they never did. But suppose that Mr. Paine does not mean *universal* experience, and confines it only to *our own*, *we have never seen nature go out of her course*; is there any contradiction in our not having done so? Or is it necessary, that if God once saw fit to suspend or alter the laws of nature, that he should do it frequently, and that instances of it should fall within *our* experience? If indeed a fact is related to have existed at a time and place, at which time and place we, being present, did not perceive it to exist; in this case, there is a contrariety which no evidence can surmount; but this cannot extend to past times, nor can we reasonably conclude, that because a thing does not happen now, it never took place. "It is not like alledging a new law of nature, or a new experiment in natural philosophy, because, when these are related, it is expected that under the same circumstances, the same effect will follow universally; and
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“ in proportion as this expectation is justly entertained, the
 “ want of a corresponding experience negatives the history.
 “ But to expect concerning a miracle that it should succeed
 “ upon repetition, is to expect that which would make it cease
 “ to be a miracle, which is contrary to its nature as such, and
 “ would totally destroy the use and purpose for which it was
 “ wrought. The force of experience as an objection to mi-
 “ racles is founded in the presumption, either that the course
 “ of nature is invariable, or that, if it be ever varied, variations
 “ will be frequent and general. Has the necessity of this al-
 “ ternative been demonstrated? Permit me to call the course
 “ of nature the agency of an intelligent being, and is there any
 “ good reason for judging this state of the case to be probable?
 “ Ought we not rather to expect, that such a Being, upon
 “ occasions of peculiar importance, may interrupt the order
 “ which he had appointed, yet, that such occasions should
 “ return seldom; that these interruptions consequently should
 “ be confined to the experience of a few; that the want of it,
 “ therefore, in many, should be matter neither of surprise,
 “ nor objection?”* Mr. Paine tells us *we have good reason to*
believe that millions of lies have been told, and that therefore it
 is more probable a man should tell a lie, than that nature should
 go out of her course, which we have never seen. But though we
 may have had experience of men’s telling lies, have we had ex-
 perience of their telling lies without any interested motive, and
 of their suffering death rather than give up the assertion of this
 lie? This is, I believe, a case no more within our experience
 than the working of a miracle, and might indeed be considered
 as a miracle. Admitting, therefore, that the credibility of tes-
 timony depends entirely upon our experience of its truth in
 given circumstances; admitting that facts varying from uni-
 form experience, especially those which imply a deviation from
 the established laws of nature, and perhaps most of all, miracles
 said to have been wrought in proof of any religion, ought not
 to be believed but with the greatest caution, and upon the
 strongest evidence; admitting even, with Mr. Hume, that no
 testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony
 be of such a kind, that the falsehood of it would be more mira-
 culous than the event it endeavours to establish; even on these
 grounds, I think, it may be shown that the reporters of the
 miracles

* Paley on the Evidences of Christianity, Vol. 1st. Prel. Disc.

miracles of Christianity ought not to be suspected, by Mr. Paine or others, of having *told a lie* to impose upon the world. "When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician," observes an ingenious writer often quoted in these letters, "the first thing he does with it, is to try it upon a simple case; and, if it produce a false result, he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration."—With his assistance then, let us proceed to try what he has called Mr. Hume's, and what I may call Mr. Paine's theorem. If twelve men, whose probity and good sense any of you had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to you an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet: if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if this threat were communicated to them separately, yet without effect; if it were at last executed; if you yourselves saw them one after another consenting to be racked, burnt, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account, still according to Mr. Paine's rule, you ought not to give credit to them; because you have had *reason to believe* men have told lies, *but you have never seen nature go out of her course*. Could you, could any man, could even Mr. Paine himself, resist such evidence? I will venture to assert, that neither he, nor any other man would reject such evidence on any other subject; but unfortunately, there is such a desire to be freed even from the mild and gentle yoke of Christianity, though this yoke is the truest liberty, that men will often shut their eyes wilfully against the truth, and cannot be convinced, not because the evidence is weak, but because they do not choose to admit it, be it ever so strong. On such men all argument is lost, and it is the best way to leave them to the misery, which will sooner or later attend such a disposition, and which they, by such conduct, draw down upon themselves. I pretend not to judge any man, or to say this is the case of any particular individual, but I much fear, that unbelievers in general are more actuated by a desire of finding Christianity false, than they are willing to acknowledge even to their own hearts, and there is surely nothing uncharitable in believing that where this desire, and not a pure love of truth, has led any

any man to reject a revelation which came from God, (supposing Christianity to be such) his conduct must be displeasing to God, who mercifully gave that revelation for *his* benefit, as well as for that of others.

From what I have said in this letter, you will perceive that I intend to lay much stress upon the sufferings of the first Christians, in consequence of their adherence to their testimony. It has been objected to me that this is no proof, because that we have instances of many men suffering for very opposite opinions, which could not both of them be true, and the Romish and Protestant sufferers in the reigns of Henry the eighth, and Mary the first, have been particularly quoted. To this objection I answer, that there is a very great difference in adhering to opinions, and to facts. In the former, a man may be mistaken, in the latter he cannot. If I believe in any doctrine, and choose to die rather than give it up, it is a proof that I really believed it, but not that my belief was well founded; but if I say that I saw a man alive, whom I knew before to have been dead and buried, and persist in asserting this, even so as to lose my life in consequence of it, it is a proof not only that I believe it, but that it took place, supposing me to have the use of my eyes, and to have been sufficiently acquainted with the man. This distinction ought to be considered, and if it be, the objection I mentioned can have no weight.

Having thus endeavoured to explain what a miracle is, and to show that there is a criterion by which we may distinguish miracles, and also to show the fallacy of some general arguments urged against the credibility of them, I shall, in the next letter, apply the whole to the miracles of Christianity, and more particularly to the resurrection, because as there is the fullest evidence to this, so, if it be once established, there will, I imagine, be no difficulty in admitting the rest on the testimony of the gospel historians. If one miracle was wrought, there might as well have been a hundred, and the divine mission of Christ being once proved, his disciples and the first preachers of his religion will scarcely be suspected of deceit.

LETTER XI.

On the Resurrection of Christ.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

AFTER what has been advanced in the preceding letters, I conceive none of you will dispute that the disciples of Jesus Christ asserted him to have been a person having a divine commission; that they spoke of him AS A MAN APPROVED OF GOD, BY MIRACLES AND WONDERS AND SIGNS WHICH GOD DID BY HIM, and that after HIS BEING CRUCIFIED AND SLAIN, GOD RAISED HIM UP, HAVING LOOSED THE PAINS OF DEATH.—Acts ii, 22, 23. This was the fact to which his disciples continually appealed, and unless it really took place, they were either knaves or fools; for it has been sufficiently established, that it was not the invention of a later period than that in which *the men called apostles* must have lived. And 1. in the first place, let it be remembered, that the fact was not impossible, God being the supposed author of it; nor was it even highly improbable, when we consider what an important end was to be answered by it. And without mentioning other ends, on which Christians of different opinions would enlarge in a different manner, supposing that God designed to give his creatures the fullest persuasion, the *most lively hope* of a resurrection from the dead, what more satisfactory method could he take than by making the preacher of that doctrine both a proof and a pattern of it? If then it was not improbable that God should acquaint mankind that he designed them for a future state, neither was it highly improbable that he should use such means of confirming their belief in it. 2. We have the testimony of four historians, two of whom were apostles and companions of this Jesus, and who had every opportunity of being well informed, and the other two contemporaries, early converts to his religion, and in all probability companions of his apostles. These writers not only mention a train of miracles wrought by Jesus, to which he repeatedly appealed, as proofs of his being sent from God; but they all agree, that in consequence of this assumption of divine authority, he was taken by the Jews, and being prosecuted before the Roman governor, was crucified in the most open and publick manner, between two malefactors.

tors. They state, that when *perfectly* dead (of which the soldiers had such proof as to refrain from breaking his legs, and to prevent any doubt of which one of them pierced him in the side with his spear) he was taken down and was buried in a sepulchre adjoining ;—that the Jews having a suspicion of his disciples carrying away the body, procured a guard of Roman soldiers to be placed on the sepulchre, after having rolled a great stone to the mouth of it and sealed it up :—that, on the morning of the third day, when some women who had attended on his preaching, went to his tomb to show their respect by anointing his body, it was no longer there ;—that in the course of that day he appeared to Mary Magdalene, to Peter, to two disciples walking to Emmaus, and to ten of his apostles, who were assembled in the evening at Jerusalem ;—that he appeared afterwards to the eleven apostles, on the succeeding first day of the week, and satisfied Thomas, by suffering him to handle and examine the wounds which had been made by his crucifixion ;—that he appeared to several of them at the sea of Galilee ;—and that after having been forty days on earth he ascended up into heaven in their presence. Paul mentions in particular his having appeared to five hundred of them at one time, and there were probably many other conversations with them, which his disciples have not recorded. 3. Luke, one of these historians of Jesus, in a work professedly a continuation of the history, mentions that his apostles preached this doctrine publickly in Jerusalem, and were punished on that account ; and he also informs us, that a young man named Saul, who was well known in Jerusalem, and who had particularly distinguished himself by his furious zeal against the disciples, was converted by a personal appearance of Christ to him ; in consequence of which, from an enemy he became a zealous preacher of Christianity, and bore testimony to the resurrection and the other facts on which it is founded.* And the writings of this remarkable person, so well known by the name of Paul, testify his conversion in consequence of his having seen Christ ; and give us at once the most interesting display of his unshaken belief of the Christian

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doctrine,

* Lord Littleton has argued the truth of Christianity, in a very ingenious and striking manner, from this conversion of St. Paul, and his work is more valuable as there is reason for believing that they were arguments which convinced himself of its truth, and induced him to quit the ranks of deism.

doctrine, and of his indefatigable zeal, and invincible courage in declaring it to the world. 4. This testimony is borne by men who had the best means of knowing the truth of what they relate, and whom we have no reason to regard in any other light than as true and faithful historians. We have, it is true, no account of the resurrection except from his disciples, nor could it be expected, since all who would acknowledge this fact would necessarily become disciples. 5. The story itself, so far from *having every mark of fraud and imposition*, on the contrary, has every internal mark of a true relation.— The different persons who relate it, do so in a different manner, dwelling on different circumstances, and varying in some minute particulars; which would not be the case in a settled plan to deceive. Nor would men, who were desirous of imposing a forgery on the world, have mentioned the suspicion of the Jews, and the charge afterwards made by them, that the body of Jesus was stolen by his disciples; nor would they have recorded the doubt of Thomas; it is indeed as contrary to every idea which can be formed of a story made to deceive, as can well be imagined. 6. According to the accounts of these historians, there were twelve men, (including Matthias, who is spoken of as a person present, Acts i, 22,) and probably some hundreds besides, who saw Jesus after his resurrection, who had an opportunity of handling him, who saw him eat and drink, who frequently conversed with him, and afterwards saw him ascend into heaven. And the characters of these men, if we may judge from circumstances, (for there is nothing said of them in the way of praise) were those of upright, honest men, who would have no desire of imposing on their fellow-creatures. 7. We are further told, that these men adhered in their testimony to this event, notwithstanding the threats of those who had procured the death of their master, that they endured scourgings and imprisonments rather than give up the *publick* declaration of what they had seen, and hazarded every thing which men generally hold most dear. 8. These men are themselves said to have wrought many extraordinary miracles in proof of the more private one of the resurrection, and they made many converts amongst the people of Jerusalem, who had every opportunity of examining into the truth of what they said. 9. In consequence of Christ's resurrection, they assembled together on the *first* day of the week, which was the cause of changing the weekly season of devotion

devotion from Saturday the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday ; and on that day they partook together of a solemn repast, consisting merely of bread and wine, a rite instituted by Christ himself at the very commencement of his sufferings, and observed as a standing memorial of them even to this day by almost every denomination of Christians. 10. They not only wrought miracles themselves, but they communicated miraculous gifts to their profelytes. 11. That the early Christians believed these facts, and that they sacrificed every thing men generally hold dear to the profession of a religion founded upon these events is unquestionable, as it appears from the testimony of enemies as well as from that of friends. 12. The Christian religion was not propagated by those means by which false religions have usually made their way : neither by civil policy, nor by military force, nor by priestly influence and fraud, nor by the aid of learning and philosophy, nor by vulgar prejudice, nor by accommodation to the vices and corrupt inclinations of mankind. Nay, it is most apparent that all these circumstances combined against it, and yet Christianity prevailed in opposition to every obstacle which was thrown in its way ; it completely overthrew polytheism in the course of a few centuries, established itself in the world, and continues to this day. 13. No motive can possibly be assigned, which should induce these men, to have invented so foolish and wicked a fraud, and to have persevered in maintaining it. It was not the means of attaining ease, or honour, or opulence, or fame. When detected, they could expect nothing but to be exposed to infamy and ruin ; and had the facts on which it was founded been false, they might easily have been disproved ; it was the interest and wish of numbers to have confuted them ; nor would it have been possible to have made a single convert of any person in possession of his senses, by a fable so palpably false and incredible ; yet it appears that thousands were converted to Christianity, in the very place where these events are said to have happened, and within a very few days after the time in which they are said to have taken place. 14. If you admit the resurrection of Christ, and the other facts recorded, you have an easy and adequate solution of the early, rapid, and extensive progress of the Christian religion, notwithstanding the obstacles opposed to it, a progress which is evident even from Heathen writers ; whereas if you deny these facts, you can assign no probable, or even possible cause
for

for a conduct so absurd, unnatural, and unaccountable, so irreconcilable to the principles of human nature, and to historical evidence.

*Whence but from Heaven, could men unskilled in arts,
In different nations born, in different parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? or how, or why,
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie?
Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price?*

DRYDEN.

Let us now suppose, that the first teachers of Christianity were either deceived themselves, or intended to deceive others. The former has been held by some; the latter is Mr. Paine's opinion. According to the former supposition, the first teachers of Christianity were *pious enthusiasts*, who followed about the country of Judea a man, whom they believed to have had divine communications, and who told them that it was necessary for him to be put to death. They *imagined* that they saw several miraculous cures; that dead persons were brought to life; that thousands were fed by a few loaves, with many other similar events. When this man, whom they called *master*, was put to death in the most disgraceful manner, and all their hopes were at an end, they *took it into their heads*, that his body was not to be found where they had buried it, but that he had been raised from the dead. They *fancied* that they saw him several times in the course of forty days, that they conversed with him, handled him, ate with him, and afterwards saw him ascend into heaven. They *imagined*, that after the ascension of their master, divine power was communicated to themselves, and that it was their duty to go about preaching to all people, and testifying what they had seen and heard at the risk of their lives. And they not only *imagined* these things themselves, but they induced others to *imagine* the same, and to profess their belief in it at the same hazard. Their converts *fancied* that they saw lame men walk, and sick men made perfectly well, in consequence of a command; and these sick persons also *imagined* that these cures were effected. Men of different nations *fancied* that they heard illiterate Jewish fishermen speak to them in their own respective languages, when it was all the time

time an unintelligible jargon. And what, perhaps, is most unaccountable of all, the Jews, who had taken such care to guard the dead body of Jesus, and who used all their exertions to prevent these *enthusiasts* from preaching, never resorted to that easy and simple proof, of producing the body, which they must have had in their power, since we are now supposing the apostles to be *enthusiasts*, and not rogues. Many are the instances we have had of heated imaginations, but never was there a case in which the senses of men were so grossly, so unaccountably imposed upon, as were those of the apostles and their converts on this supposition. You will hardly believe me when I tell you, that there have been men, men who would be thought *philosophers*, and certainly were *learned*, who were credulous enough to believe that thousands of men took it into their heads without any reason at all, that Christ and his apostles really wrought miracles; that they madly devoted their labour, their fortunes, and even their lives to the propagation of this groundless opinion; and that by their inflexible zeal and obstinacy, they forced the belief of it upon the rest of the world. Would not such an enthusiasm as this have been more strange and unaccountable than a resurrection from the dead?

The apostles however, objects Mr. Paine, were impostors and wished to establish a *pious fraud*. What follows from this supposition? That a few ignorant, illiterate men, living in Galilee, the most obscure and disreputable part of Judea, which was itself thought very meanly of by most other nations, that a few ignorant men of this country, fishermen, or in an equally low station, took upon themselves the task of reforming the worship and manners of the world by the means of imposture; that they took as their master, one Jesus, a carpenter and their own countryman, who had from benevolent intentions preached such strict morality, and had so severely inveighed against the vices of his countrymen, especially those in high stations, that he had been publicly executed (you will recollect that Mr. Paine acquits Jesus of all concern with the imposture, but on what grounds I cannot well imagine;) that they stole his body from the sepulchre, and pretended he had risen from the dead;—that they made this event the foundation of their system, although they knew THAT CHRIST CRUCIFIED WAS TO THE JEWS A STUMBLING BLOCK, AND TO ALL THE GENTILES FOOLISHNESS;—that their object in this *pious fraud*,

fraud, was to overturn polytheism, and introduce the worship of the one true God, and to promote universal benevolence, piety, and virtue;—that they pretended to the power of working miracles, and speaking in different languages, and that they openly attempted these without fear of discovery, and without having ever been detected;—that so attached were they to this fraud of their own invention, that they persisted in it at the risk of every thing dear to men;—that many of them died in attestation of it, and that they prevailed on others to do the same;—that they persuaded a considerable number of persons, not in Judæa only, but throughout the Roman empire, to believe them, to forsake their old religion, to adopt a new one under great worldly disadvantages, and to lead lives suitable to their profession;—that such was the number of these converts as, in a very short time, to occasion a desertion of the heathen temples, and to draw down upon them the vengeance of Roman emperors;—that these ignorant fishermen contrived such a story as could not be proved a forgery, either in Jerusalem where the scene was laid, or elsewhere, although many of the facts appealed to were of a publick nature;—that, with such an origin, this imposture, improbable, as we are told, in itself, and *with every mark of fraud stamped upon the face of it*, and teaching a new, unpopular, and unaccommodating religion, made a rapid progress in an enlightened age and country, in opposition to the prejudices, vices, interests, and inclinations of mankind, and to the authority and influence of the magistrate, the priest, the philosopher, and the illiterate multitude;—that this imposture has also escaped the detection of men of sense and ability, the most enlightened and diligent enquirers after truth, until the present day;—and finally, that after having so long and successfully imposed upon a very great part of the world, this fraud has at length been detected, not by testimony to show that such events as were pretended did not happen, but by denying that miracles are capable of proof, because we have never seen any, and by asserting that we ought to have *ocular and manual demonstration*. Such is what Mr. Paine would have you believe; but as you do not experience that men act in such a strange manner, you will probably be of opinion, that to suppose multitudes of men in their sober senses to have acted thus contrary to every motive which we observe to influence the human breast, you will imagine this, I say, more incredible, more contrary to the course of nature, and

and consequently more *miraculous*, than for the events to be true, which are alledged as proofs of the divine authority of the gospel.

I have now I hope satisfactorily shown what a weight of evidence is in support of our Lord's resurrection, and what absurdities would follow from the supposition of its being a pious fraud, or the dream of enthusiasts; there are one or two circumstances, however, mentioned by Mr. Paine, which I shall briefly notice. He objects to there not being more *equal and universal* evidence of the fact. What has been already quoted in the fifth letter from Archdeacon Paley, might be again urged here, but I would add, that if the evidence had been satisfactory to all the people of Judea, so that they could not have helped believing in it, it would then probably have been said by Mr. Paine, and other *reasonable* men of the present day, that it was all a collusion, tending to exalt the Jewish nation, whereas now, the Jews are a *surviving evidence* that there was no collusion, but that from their enmity they would have detected the imposture if it had been in their power. Besides it would have weakened the evidence derived from the opposition given to it from all quarters. But the Jews *say it is false*; true, and they say that his apostles stole the body of Jesus.* But is this probable? Is it likely that a guard of *Roman* soldiers should all fall asleep, and continue so, whilst a very large stone was rolled away, and a body removed? Would they not have been severely punished, if this had been

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* It seems worth while to remark here that though Mr. Paine has made the above assertion, yet he has not given his authority. What assertions modern Jews may have made, I cannot say, but neither their great historian Josephus, nor the Talmuds, which they esteem as the highest authority, and which were not published till Christianity was established, and of course well known, contain such an assertion; at least if they do it seems to have escaped the diligent researches of Doctors Lightfoot and Lardner, and no one will imagine that Mr. Paine has made such a discovery. On the contrary, the Jewish writers, though they have endeavoured to misrepresent other facts, seem to have observed the strictest silence respecting the Resurrection, most probably because they were not able to controvert it. That an attempt of this kind was made in the very first instance we learn from the gospels, and it is not unlikely that the unsuccessfulness of that early attempt prevented the repetition of it. Most probably Mr. Paine had nothing more than this early attempt in his eye, and that of course his sole authority is what is recorded by the Evangelists; for when it will serve his purpose, he seems ready enough to make use of their testimony.

the case? Is it not more probable that they were bribed to say the body was stolen, and that they were protected from punishment by the influence of the chief priests? And supposing the disciples had the body, what could they do with it? It will hardly be imagined, that in such circumstances he was brought to life again by natural means, and we have already seen what improbabilities follow from the supposition of deceit in the first Christians.

Some variations in the narratives given by the evangelists are often objected; I have no doubt that these might be reconciled to a very great degree, but it will take up more time than would be consistent with my present design. I will therefore conclude this letter, hoping enough has been said to convince you without *ocular and manual demonstration* which you cannot have, that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and is consequently to be considered as a divine teacher, both he and his apostles having appealed to this and other miracles as proofs of his being so. Having admitted one miracle, you can have no reasonable objection to receive others on the authority of such competent witnesses as the writers of the New Testament, and finally admitting the divine character of Jesus, and the consequent mission of his apostles, you will readily receive the writings which contain the history of his life, and an account of his doctrines, as containing an account of a revelation from God, and as therefore deserving the honourable appellation of the *word of God*, and to these writings you will naturally resort, for the best and most genuine account of what was taught by your divine master and his apostles.

LETTER XII.

On the Evidence for the Mosaic Revelation.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

MR. PAINE has said a great deal against the Jewish scriptures, which I have no intention to examine, because I do not regard

regard it as affecting the main object of these letters, which was to prove the truth of Christianity not of Judaism. It has been the fashion to attack Christianity through the sides of Judaism, but though these objections are founded chiefly in misconstruction or exaggeration, it is not incumbent upon the defender of Christianity as such, to "maintain the circumstantial truth of each separate passage of the Old Testament, the genuineness of every book, or the information, fidelity, and judgment of every writer in it;" nor would the foundations of our religion be at all weakened, even though we gave up the speaking of Balaam's ass, or the stories of Samson and Jonah, although these stories do not strike me in the same light they do Mr. Paine. Having premised this, I shall content myself with selecting a few passages from Dr. Priestley's letters to a philosophical unbeliever, respecting the truth of the Mosaic dispensation.

"It has been the custom," says he, "with unbelievers, to divert themselves and their readers with the history of the Jews, with some of the peculiarities of their religion, and especially with their stupidity, obstinacy, and ignorance, compared with the more polished nations of antiquity. But it has been without considering that all these latter charges are highly unfavourable to their own object in advancing them, if it be admitted (which cannot surely be denied) that Jews, stupid and ignorant as they have been, were nevertheless men, and not a species of beings totally different from that of other men. For it is obvious to remark, that so obstinate and intractable as unbelievers describe them to have been, (as indeed their own history shows that they were) it must have been peculiarly difficult to impose upon them, with respect to any thing to which they were exceedingly averse. Also, from a people so unpolished and ignorant, so far behind other nations in the arts of peace and war, we should not naturally expect doctrines and sentiments superior to any thing of the kind that we find in the most improved nations. And yet, the bare inspection of their writings proves, that with respect to religion and the doctrines concerning God and providence, the Jews were in a high degree knowing, and all other nations ignorant and

“ barbarous.* In these respects, therefore the Jews must
 “ have been possessed of advantages superior to those of other
 “ nations; and if these advantages were not *natural*, they
 “ must

* It has been objected both to Judaism, and Christianity, that they teach wrong notions of the solar system, and of natural philosophy. But to this the answer is very short. They teach nothing about either. They profess no such purpose. Nor was it possible in the nature of things, without counteracting, and absolutely defeating their grand design. Nay they could not have succeeded in such an attempt had it been their sole object, under the then existing circumstances of the world, without working the most inconceivable miracles, both on the senses, and the understandings of their hearers. Even at this day, after all the discoveries that have been made, and all the lectures that have been given, and books that have been written, how few comparatively comprehend, or are capable of comprehending any thing of the matter? Can any idea then be more extravagant than that Moses or Christ should have been bound to make astronomers of the multitudes with whom they were conversant? And yet they must have either done this, or relinquished the whole business of their missions, if they had said one word upon the subject. This was the inevitable alternative. What then remained but to adopt the language of the times; to speak as they could be best understood: to declare to man merely what was necessary to his moral happiness, and what he could not discover for himself by any research, or demonstrate to himself by any experiments; and to leave to time and labour to develop, what it is evident God ordained that man should find out for himself, and what though highly useful to society, and productive of sublime pleasures to a few, never was, nor ever will be, essential to individual comfort. Besides, let it be observed that if it be chargeable against the *Christian scriptures* that they teach wrong notions of the solar system, it is also chargeable on Mr. Paine's *scriptures*. For they too convey to the senses of man, the very same notions which Mr. Paine complains of in the bible. They were the grand, the primary deceivers, and when Pythagoras in earlier, and Copernicus in later times, had conceived and attempted to promulgate a different doctrine, they were put down and confronted, not by an appeal to the bible, but by an appeal to the Heavens themselves. Nor could the deception have ever been detected, if providence had not, in the 16th Century, blessed mankind with the invention of the Telescope. Of course, then, if Mr. Paine denies the divinity of the bible, because it has accommodated itself to the erroneous ideas of mankind respecting astronomy; he ought also to deny the divine origin of the Heavens, the appearances of which deceived mankind in the first instance, and made such an accommodation in the language of the scriptures indispensable. As to the effect which Mr. Paine attributes to the knowledge of astronomical and philosophical truth, viz that it *scatters the christian system in the mind like feathers in the air*; it is not disputed that it may do so in light minds, which embark on the sea of science like vessels without ballast; but that it has no tendency to do so in sound and solid understandings, we are abundantly assured by the irrefragable instances of Boyle and Sir Isaac Newton, of Ray and Derham, of Bounet and De Luc.

“ must have been of a supernatural kind. It must be allowed
 “ as a striking fact, that the Jewish religion was most essen-
 “ tially different from that of any other nation in the world.
 “ The *object of their worship* was quite different, and infinitely
 “ superior to any thing that other nations looked up to. Also
 “ what we may call the *morality* of their worship, the cha-
 “ racter of the rites of it, and the temper and disposition of
 “ mind promoted by it, were still more different. In all these
 “ essential particulars, the religion of the Jews was so strik-
 “ ingly different from that of any of their neighbouring na-
 “ tions, that it could never have been derived from any of
 “ them, and an attachment to the one must have created an
 “ aversion to the other.—As the Jews, though an ancient
 “ nation, were not so ancient as the Egyptians or other na-
 “ tions by whom they were completely surrounded, and as,
 “ with respect to natural science, it is acknowledged that
 “ they were much behind them, how came they possessed of
 “ such just and sublime conceptions, with respect to the sub-
 “ ject of *religion*, and of whom could they have learned such
 “ rational worship? This effect, as well as every other, must
 “ have had an adequate cause, and the circumstances of the
 “ Jews considered, I see no adequate cause of so great an ef-
 “ fect besides those divine communications, which are re-
 “ corded in the books of Moses, which show that the univer-
 “ sal parent made choice of that nation, obstinate and stupid
 “ as it always was, to be the means of preserving in the world
 “ the true knowledge of himself, and the purity of his wor-
 “ ship, amidst the universal degeneracy of the rest of mankind.
 “ When we consider the kind of rage for the ceremonies of
 “ idolatrous religions and the immorality they countenance,
 “ shown by all nations; how can we account for Abraham
 “ abandoning the religion of his country (to say nothing of
 “ his removing to so great a distance from it) and the Israel-
 “ ites, when they were become a nation, relinquishing the
 “ rites of the Egyptians, and adopting a religion and ceremo-
 “ nies of so very different a nature? This is what no nation
 “ ever did of a sudden voluntarily, or could ever be brought
 “ to do involuntarily, by ordinary means; and that this was
 “ involuntary on the part of the Israelites is most evident,
 “ from their frequent relapses into their former superstitions,
 “ from which they were with great difficulty reclaimed.—
 “ The only possible explanation of this wonderful *fact*, I will
 “ venture

“ venture to say, is to be found in the books of Moses, and
 “ other writings of the Old Testament, in which we have an
 “ authentick account of the frequent interpositions of the Di-
 “ vine Being, to bring about so great an event by miracles,
 “ which the obstinacy and incredulity of that nation, great as
 “ they always were, were not able to withstand.—If we
 “ consider the miracles of which we have an account in the
 “ books of Moses (which were unquestionably written at the
 “ time when they are said to have been performed) we see
 “ them to have been wonderfully calculated to produce this
 “ effect; and they were of such a nature, as that no nation
 “ whatever could have been deceived into the belief of them,
 “ even if they had been as well disposed, as we know they
 “ were ill disposed, towards the object of them. When the
 “ great scene opens, the Israelites were in the most abject state
 “ of slavery in Egypt, without the least prospect of relief,
 “ their oppressors being a warlike nation, themselves unused
 “ to arms, and no foreign power to take their part. Yet
 “ though these warlike Egyptians, who derived the greatest
 “ advantages from their servitude, did every thing in their
 “ power to detain them, they actually marched out of the
 “ country, without leaving any part of their property behind;
 “ they passed forty years in a wilderness, from which so great
 “ a multitude could not have derived sufficient sustenance;
 “ and they took possession of a country occupied by several
 “ numerous and warlike nations. Such are the *facts*, and I
 “ see no probable method of accounting for them, but upon
 “ the supposition of the truth of those miracles, which are re-
 “ corded in the writings of Moses, and which explain the
 “ whole in a most satisfactory manner.”—After illustrating
 this, the Doctor proceeds: “ such is the account that the
 “ books of Moses and Joshua give of these things, and to say
 “ nothing of the internal marks of credibility in the writings
 “ of Moses, which bear as evident marks of authenticity, as
 “ any narrative, or journal of events, that was ever written;
 “ the miracles introduced into the history, supply the only
 “ possible hypothesis to account for the rest. A fact which
 “ cannot be denied, is the *belief* of all the Israelitish nation,
 “ from that time to the present, that such events did take
 “ place, that the history we now have of them was written
 “ by Moses himself, till near the time of his death, and that
 “ the narrative was continued by other persons, who recorded
 “ the

“ the events of their own times.—If the antiquity of the books
 “ of Moses, &c. be denied, it still remains to be accounted
 “ for, how all the nation could, at any period of time, be
 “ made to believe that their ancestors had come from Egypt,
 “ through the Red Sea, and the river Jordan, and that such
 “ a *law* as theirs, had been delivered in an audible voice
 “ from Mount Sinai, when none of those things had ever
 “ happened. This is not more probable, than that the Eng-
 “ lish nation should at this time be brought to believe, that
 “ their ancestors originally came from France, and that they
 “ crossed from Calais to Dover without ships. An attempt
 “ to impose upon a whole nation such an account as this, and
 “ especially a history of the events said to have been written
 “ at the time, when nothing of the kind had been heard of
 “ before, would at any period be treated with ridicule and
 “ neglect. No people ever were, or ever can be, so imposed
 “ upon, especially when the things proposed to them are so
 “ disagreeable and burthenfome, as the laws of Moses cer-
 “ tainly were to the Jewish nation.—The whole body of
 “ the Jewish nation, attached as they formerly were to the
 “ superstitions of their neighbours, never entertained a doubt
 “ with respect to any of the contents of the books of Moses.
 “ That there were such persons as Abraham, Isaac, and Ja-
 “ cob, Moses, and Aaron, &c. and that the things recorded
 “ of them were true, they always believed as firmly as we
 “ do the history of Julius Cæsar, or William the Conqueror;
 “ and though the nation has continued several thousand years,
 “ and has been near two thousand years dispersed among all
 “ other nations, their belief in the ancient history of their na-
 “ tion, and their respect for the books which contain it, are
 “ not in the least diminished. There is no example of any
 “ other nation suffering as the Jews have done, without being
 “ utterly lost, and confounded with the common mass of
 “ mankind, and their religious customs disappearing with
 “ them—This alone, I will venture to say, is a fact which
 “ no philosopher can account for, without admitting the au-
 “ thenticity of the books which contain the principles of the
 “ Jewish religion, and the truth of the miracles by which it
 “ was proved to be divine.”

With respect to the authenticity of the Jewish scriptures, I
 shall content myself with remarking, that Jews and Christians
 have

have agreed in receiving them ; that we have many old versions and paraphrases of them, one of them made about three hundred years before Christ, and not materially differing ; that the different Jewish sects concurred in receiving them ; that they carry strong internal marks of veracity ; and that the forgery of them would have been attended with considerable, if not insurmountable difficulties.

LETTER XIII.

On Prophecy in general.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

THE next question I proposed to discuss was, whether there can be such a thing as prophecy ; in what circumstances we may regard prophecies as proofs of a divine mission ; and whether we have any evidence from prophecies in the Old or New Testament of the truth of Christianity ?

Prophecy may be defined, a supernatural prediction of a future event ; and those persons who believe, that the Almighty Maker of all things is acquainted with what will come to pass, as well as with what has already taken place in this world which he has created, those persons, I say, who admit foreknowledge in God himself, must also admit that, if he pleases, he can communicate to his creatures an account of future events, either for the purpose of giving them consolation under affliction, of warning them of the dangers in which they are placed, or of affording them evidence of the truth of a divine revelation. For one or other of these purposes, and sometimes for all of them, it seems to have pleased the Almighty, to have communicated the power of prophecy to many men amongst the Jews ; at least if the Jewish and Christian histories be true, there were men who laid claim to this power, and whose prophecies have been handed down to our times. The word *prophet*, however does not *always* signify in scripture a foreteller of future events, nor is it confined to one sense, as Mr. Paine might have known, if he had not disdained the labour
of

of enquiry. It *bolted* into Mr. Paine's mind, from the connection the word sometimes has with musical instruments, that prophet must have meant poet or musician; *he treated this voluntary visitor with civility*, and applied it to the explanation of Saul's prophesying; he thought it removed the difficulty, and he *entertained* it, never reflecting that the word might have many significations; he then tried to select a few lines in measure from the common *English* version, to which, being himself a poet, he tacked some other lines of his own composing, and thus proved to his complete satisfaction that the *Hebrew* books were composed in *poetical measure*. After this he recollected that the *prophets* were divided generally into the greater and lesser; this appeared very strange to him; there could be no degrees in the power of foretelling events; one must have been as great as the other; and as the very natural thought that they were so called from the *size* of their books, never occurred to him, he set this down as a further proof, that they were mere poets. Such is the *convincing* argument, by which Mr. Paine has *put the ax to the root* of prophecy, as he himself confidently expresses it, and has rendered *all the inferences drawn from the writings of the men stiled prophets, all the respect paid to them, and all the commentaries written upon them, not worth disputing about!* I should think it an insult to your understandings, to offer a serious refutation of such an argument. Some other objections which he has made (being determined, I suppose, to clinch the matter) are however calculated to mislead you.—He has said, that *all the things called prophecies, in the book called the bible, are related in such a loose and obscure manner, as to be out of the comprehension of those that heard them, and so equivocal as to fit almost any circumstance that might happen afterwards; that every thing unintelligible was prophetical; that it was deemed sufficient if the supposed prophet in shooting with a long bow of a thousand years, struck within a thousand miles of a mark; and that even if prophecies were read, they could not answer the purpose of proving a divine mission.* The method I shall take of refuting these assertions, will be by pointing out to you some instances of clear and intelligible prophecies which have been fulfilled, but I shall previously remark with Doctor Priestley, that “it is not necessary the event “should correspond to the prophecy so exactly, as that it “might have been distinctly described before it came to pass.

“ For in how dark and obscure a manner soever, the prophecy be expressed, it will be sufficiently manifest that it came from God, if, after the event, the correspondence between them be so great, that human foresight could not have described it in such a manner, and if it be highly improbable, or impossible that it should have been described in such a manner at random. - But many prophecies recorded in scripture were as intelligible before as after the event, and yet did not at all contribute to their own accomplishment, by inducing the friends of revelation to exert themselves in order to bring about the thing foretold.”

The criterion by which we distinguish a *prophecy* to be of divine original is, its having been delivered before the event, and the event being beyond the reach of human sagacity and sufficiently correspondent to the prediction. Such prophecies, and such only can afford us any proof of the divine mission of the person who delivers them, and we contend that such prophecies are to be found both in the Jewish and Christian revelations. I would further observe, that prophecies were never appealed to for the conviction of the persons who heard them delivered, unless they also witnessed the accomplishment of them. Those persons had usually other proofs of the authority of the prophet, and the predictions answered the other ends I have already mentioned, either of consoling them, or warning them, as most of those to the Israelites, or of giving them *signs* to direct them, as was that of Christ respecting Jerusalem. Their value as proofs of a mission is to those who live at or after the time of their fulfilment, and then, if the event were beyond the reach of human sagacity, and sufficiently correspondent to the prediction, we may fairly conclude that it came from God.

Christians appeal to prophecies, as proofs of the divine mission of their master in two ways, showing that prophecies were fulfilled in him, which were delivered previous to his appearance, and that prophecies which were delivered by him, have been fulfilled. In the first place, there are many prophecies respecting Christ in the Old Testament, in books *certainly* published long before his appearance, and which could not have been inserted since, or the Jews must have detected it; which prophecies, though otherwise explained by the Jews, who yet expect

expect the accomplishment of them, seem to be free from all obscurity or equivocalness; and which were so applied by Christ himself, and his apostles. Of these one of the most striking is that which begins at the 13th verse of the 52nd chapter of Isaiah, and continues through the remainder of that and the 53rd chapter. In this passage were foretold, amongst other things, the meanness of the Messiah's appearance, the manner in which the Jewish nation received him, the miraculous cures performed by him, his sufferings and death, and his burial in the sepulchre of a rich man, and also, that although his enemies had prevailed so far as to put him to death, yet by his instructions, and by his means, a great reformation would be effected in the world, much to his own satisfaction, and to the everlasting advantage of many of the human race. In the book of Daniel, the *time* of the Messiah's appearance was clearly predicted, and it was added, that he should be put to *death*. KNOW THEREFORE AND UNDERSTAND, THAT FROM THE GOING FORTH OF THE COMMANDMENT TO RESTORE AND TO BUILD JERUSALEM, UNTO THE MESSIAH THE PRINCE, SHALL BE SEVEN WEEKS, AND THREESCORE AND TWO WEEKS; THE STREETS SHALL BE BUILT AGAIN, AND THE WALL, EVEN IN TROUBLOUS TIMES. AND AFTER THREESCORE AND TWO WEEKS SHALL MESSIAH BE CUT OFF, BUT NOT FOR HIMSELF.* Danl. ix. 25. By reckoning a year for each day according to the ascertained language of the prophets, the time mentioned in this prediction will be found near 500 years, and it was about this period after the decree obtained for rebuilding Jerusalem, that Christ made his appearance. And the history of that period fully shows that a prophet was expected about that time. It was foretold (Isaiah xi. 2—4. xxxv. 4—6.) that the great personage who was to appear, would be eminent for the wisdom, piety, and benevolence of his character, and for the miraculous works he should perform, circumstances which all who have read the gospels must acknowledge to have been descriptive of him, whom we

* I have corrected a mistake in the pointing of the above passage in the common translation, which has a tendency to render it obscure. Some difficulty may probably remain, but the tendency of the passage is very clear, and the enquirer after truth will derive advantage from consulting the authors who have explained it, particularly Dr. Blayney's *dissertation on the seventy weeks*.

believe to have been the Christ, and there is another description of him in the same book ch. lxi. v. 1. to which Jesus himself referred in the town of Nazareth, Luke iv. 18, and in his answer to the messengers of John the Baptist, Matt. xi. 5, in which, amongst other particulars, were mentioned his preaching the gospel to the poor, and binding up the broken hearted; and certainly no system of religion was ever proposed to mankind, which is so well calculated to teach morality to the ignorant, and to afford comfort to the afflicted. It was further foretold (Isaiah xi. 3, 4. Malachi iii. 1.) that though appearing in mean circumstances, he should be introduced by a remarkable forerunner, whose business it should be to awaken the attention, and the expectations of the people. This character John the Baptist fully answered, who not only taught repentance himself, but proclaimed that he was only the forerunner of a much greater personage, and pointed out Jesus as that personage; and we are informed that he applied to himself the prophecies referred to, and also that they were said by Christ to be fulfilled in him. There are many other prophecies pointing out other circumstances relating to Christ or his religion, dispersed through the prophetick writings, which have been collected and explained by several authors. I shall not however take up your time by producing them, but shall conclude this part, by requesting you to "bear in mind, " what," as Archdeacon Paley observes, "has been often, and I " think, truly urged by the advocates of Christianity, that there " is no other eminent person to the history of whose life, so " many circumstances can be made to apply. They who " object that much has been done by the power of chance, " the ingenuity of accommodation, and the industry of research, ought to try whether the same, or any thing like it, " could be done, if Mahomet, or any other person were proposed as the subject of Jewish prophecy."

I shall now proceed to refer you to some prophecies which were delivered by our Lord, and which have been fulfilled. All of you, who have read or heard the New Testament, must recollect various minute circumstances relating to his own future situation foretold by Christ, and especially the particulars of his death and resurrection. You must also recollect the prophecy respecting the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and the calamities to be endured by the Jews, which occur,
Mat.

Mat. xxiii. 37, 38. Luke xix. 41. &c. xxiii. 27. &c. and most fully, Mat. xxiv. and Luke xx. The accomplishment of them will be very evident on perusing Josephus's *History of the Wars of the Jews*. I will mention one particular circumstance: Jesus was with his disciples at a place whence they could see the temple, and they desired him to attend to the magnificence of the temple; he answered, SEE YE NOT ALL THESE THINGS? VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THERE SHALL NOT BE LEFT HERE ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER THAT SHALL NOT BE THROWN DOWN. This is related by an historian whose fidelity we have no cause to suspect, and whose work we have good reason to believe was published before the event; when it was delivered, Judea was in peaceable subjection to the Romans, the most powerful nation in the world, and though they bore the yoke with impatience, there was no probability of their being soon able to make opposition, or at least such as would occasion a long siege; and even if this had been probable, it could not be expected that a people so much attached to the fine arts, would destroy so glorious a structure as the temple was. The event then was beyond the reach of human sagacity, yet Christ said it would happen before THAT GENERATION HAD PASSED AWAY. His prediction was fulfilled; the Jews with astonishing obstinacy defended their city; and notwithstanding the desire of the Roman general to preserve it, the temple was set on fire and completely destroyed.

Another prophecy of Christ's to which I shall call your attention, occurs in the two following parables: THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED, WHICH A MAN TOOK, AND SOWED IN HIS FIELD: WHICH INDEED IS THE LEAST OF ALL SEEDS; BUT WHEN IT IS GROWN, IT IS THE GREATEST AMONG HERBS, AND BECOMETH A TREE; SO THAT THE BIRDS OF THE AIR COME AND LODGE IN THE BRANCHES THEREOF. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO LEAVEN, WHICH A WOMAN TOOK, AND HID IN THREE MEASURES OF MEAL, TILL THE WHOLE WAS LEAVENED. Matt. xiii. 31—33. This prophecy was delivered in parables which was the usual way of speaking amongst all the eastern nations. There is however nothing obscure in it; by the *kingdom of heaven*, the gospel is intended, as appears from other

other passages, and the similitudes made use of, are such as would strike every person who heard them. At the time they were delivered, and also when they were recorded by Matthew, there was equal improbability, in the eyes of men, of the event taking place which was foretold: the first preachers were illiterate men, of low birth, and of a despised nation, and the doctrines were such as would occasion strong opposition from every quarter; yet notwithstanding every obstacle, Christianity *has* proceeded in the *gradual* manner so clearly implied by the growth of a plant, and the working of leaven, and the prediction is now going on rapidly to its perfect accomplishment. I might lay before you some others, and I have no doubt that the manifest accomplishment of some in that *book of riddles, the Revelations*, will furnish additional ones to our posterity; those, however, I have mentioned will answer my present design, and serve to strengthen your belief in the divine original of Christianity.

LETTER XIV.

On Prophecies respecting various nations contained in the Jewish Scriptures.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

IT is my intention in the present letter, to refer you to some prophecies in the Old Testament relating to various nations which had connections with the Jews and to make a few remarks on them.—And 1st, the prophecies concerning the posterity of Abraham by Ishmael have been wonderfully fulfilled, and the *present race of the Arabians*, who are chiefly descended from Ishmael, is an attestation of their truth and divinity. See Genesis xvi, xvii. 20. I shall now observe, that the descendants of Ishmael were a considerable nation in very early times, and that under Mahomet and his successors, the Arabs extended their conquests over a great part of the world. All the northern

northern coasts of Africa abound with Arabs, and Palæstine is now almost entirely occupied by them; they still retain their ancient seats, and are as numerous there as ever. It was said that Ishmael should be a *wild* man, and the Arabs are wild and intractable even to a proverb. It was said *that his hand should be against every man, and every man's hand against him*; and it is well known, that the Arabs, and probably the Arabs only, of all the nations of the world, have constantly lived in a state of hostility against all mankind, plundering their neighbours and all travellers who are obliged to pass through any part of their country. It seems to be intimated by Ishmael's *dwelling in the midst of all his brethren*, that his posterity should *continue* to dwell among them, and to subsist as a separate nation, notwithstanding this state of constant hostility; and it is truly remarkable, that, though the conquest of Arabia has been attempted by almost all the great empires, which have bordered upon them, it has never yet been subdued, and no nation ever made the attempt without repenting of it; having met with nothing but disgrace and loss. This was most remarkably the case in the time of Trajan, the most warlike of all the Roman emperors, and, when the empire was in its greatest strength.* This prophecy was *certainly* in existence above two thousand years ago, probably above four thousand, and we see the accomplishment of it extending to our own times: could this have been the effect of human foresight, or does the writer *in shooting his long bow, only strike within a thousand miles of a mark*?

When NINEVEH and BABYLON were in all their power and splendour, their utter destruction was foretold, and the prophecies concerning the latter were very circumstantial, mentioning the time, and manner, and even the name of the conqueror. The description that is given of the condition to which it should be reduced, corresponds most exactly to several successive stages of it; and the whole prophecy is completely verified at this day. The destruction of Babylon is foretold in general terms by Isaiah xxi. 9. and Jeremiah l. 17, 18, and li. 8. The time of this event was fixed by Jeremiah, who wrote at the time that the Babylonian empire was in its greatest strength

* Priestley's Institutes of natural and revealed Religion, Vol. 1, page 404, &c. from which useful work most of the remarks in this letter have been copied. The inquisitive reader will also consult Bp. Newton's dissertations on the prophecies.

strength and glory, Jer. xxv. 11, 12. THESE NATIONS SHALL SERVE THE KING OF BABYLON SEVENTY YEARS, AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, THAT WHEN SEVENTY YEARS ARE ACCOMPLISHED, I WILL PUNISH THE KING OF BABYLON, AND THAT NATION, SAYS THE LORD. The conquests of Cyrus, who besieged and took Babylon, were distinctly foretold by Isaiah; and that great conqueror is even mentioned by name, Isaiah xlv. 1. &c. We have also an account of both those nations which joined in the conquest of Babylon, Isaiah xxi. 2. GO UP O ELAM;* BESIEGE O MEDIA; and also in Jeremiah, li. 11. THE LORD HATH RAISED UP THE SPIRIT OF THE KINGS OF THE MEDES; FOR HIS DEVICE IS AGAINST BABYLON TO DESTROY IT. The prophecies in which the utter destruction of Babylon is foretold are remarkably emphatical, and the accomplishment of them has been no less remarkably exact. Isaiah xiii. 19—22. AND BABYLON, THE GLORY OF KINGDOMS, THE BEAUTY OF THE CHALDEES EXCELLENCY, SHALL BE AS WHEN GOD OVERTHREW SODOM AND GOMORRAH. IT SHALL NEVER BE INHABITED, NEITHER SHALL IT BE DWELT IN FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION; NEITHER SHALL THE ARABIAN PITCH HIS TENT THERE, NEITHER SHALL THE SHEPHERDS MAKE THEIR FOLD THERE, BUT WILD BEASTS OF THE DESERT SHALL LIE THERE, AND THEIR HOUSES SHALL BE FULL OF DOLEFUL CREATURES, AND OWLS SHALL DWELL THERE, AND SATYRS SHALL DANCE THERE; AND THE WILD BEASTS OF THE ISLAND SHALL CRY IN THEIR DESOLATE HOUSES, AND DRAGONS IN THEIR PLEASANT PALACES; AND HER TIME IS NEAR COME, AND HER DAY SHALL NOT BE PROLONGED. See also Isaiah xiv. 22, 23. and Jeremiah l. li. Chapters throughout. History shows the full accomplishment of these, and many other very circumstantial prophecies concerning the destruction of Babylon. This great city never recovered the blow which it received from Cyrus; for the river never returned to its old channel, and the neighbouring country becoming marshy, it soon became a very disagreeable situation, and in time not habitable. *The gradual desolation of Babylon,*
till

* It may be proper to observe for the information of some reader that Elam is the name by which Persia is generally called in the scriptures. By the Medes and Persians under Cyrus, Babylon was taken

till it came to that state of utter destruction, which is described by the prophets, is truly remarkable. Diodorus Siculus, who wrote a little before the time of Christ, says that the buildings were then ruined and decayed, a small part of it only being inhabited, and the rest of the inclosure employed in tillage. Pliny who wrote in the first century after Christ, says that Babylon was reduced to solitude ; being exhausted by the neighbourhood of Seleucia, which had been built upon the Tygris, not very far from it. Pausanias, who wrote about the middle of the second century, says that of Babylon, the greatest city that the sun ever saw, there was nothing remaining but the walls ; and Lucian who wrote about the same time, says that in a little time, it would be sought for and not be found, like Nineveh. In the time of Jerome, who lived in the fourth century, the whole inclosure of the walls of Babylon was actually converted into a chace for keeping wild beasts, and was used for that, and no other purpose, by many of the kings of Persia. At length even the walls of Babylon, so much celebrated for their height and strength, were demolished ; but whether by the Saracens, who conquered that country, is not known. We find no mention made of Babylon for many centuries after this ; but Benjamin, a Jew of Tudela, who travelled into that country, about seven hundred years ago, says that there then remained some of the ruins of Babylon, particularly of Nebuchadnezzar's palace ; but that people were afraid to go into the place on account of the serpents and scorpions with which it swarmed. At present it is not agreed among travellers where the great city of Babylon stood.

The prophecies concerning TYRE were, likewise, exceedingly numerous, referring to several successive periods in the history of that great commercial city ; and they have all been remarkably fulfilled. Of these prophecies I shall only mention the last, as it corresponds to the present state of Tyre. Tyre was the most flourishing commercial city in the world for a very long period, and was of considerable importance so late as the reign of Alexander the great, soon after whose reign the Jewish scriptures were *certainly* in existence, having been translated into the Greek language. There is however abundant reason to believe, that the prophet Ezekiel lived at the time of the Babylonish captivity, near three hundred years
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before the conquest of Alexander, and at a time when Tyre was at its highest pitch of power and splendour, being able to support itself in independence, when all the adjoining countries were subject to the Assyrian or Babylonian empires. The following are the words of the prophet. Ezek. xxvi. 3, &c. **THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD, BEHOLD, I AM AGAINST THEE, O TYRUS, AND WILL CAUSE MANY NATIONS TO COME UP AGAINST THEE, AS THE SEA CAUSETH HIS WAVES TO COME UP. AND THEY SHALL DESTROY THE WALLS OF TYRUS AND BREAK DOWN HER TOWERS : I WILL ALSO SCRAPE HER DUST FROM HER, AND MAKE HER LIKE THE TOP OF A ROCK. IT SHALL BE A PLACE FOR THE SPREADING OF NETS IN THE MIDST OF THE SEA.** The same circumstance is repeated afterwards, verse 14, **I WILL MAKE THEE LIKE THE TOP OF A ROCK ; THOU SHALT BE A PLACE TO SPREAD NETS UPON : THOU SHALT BE BUILT NO MORE ; FOR I THE LORD HAVE SPOKEN IT, SAITH THE LORD GOD.** And again, verse 21, **I WILL MAKE THEE A TERROR, AND THOU SHALT BE NO MORE. THOUGH THOU BE SOUGHT FOR, YET SHALT THOU NEVER BE FOUND AGAIN, SAITH THE LORD GOD.** If we trace the history of this great city, we shall find that it suffered so much in consequence of several conquests, that there is not now the least trace of the ancient city ; and that which was afterwards built upon an island, and was called the *new city*, is now a heap of ruins, and is only visited by a few fishermen. Parvillerius, whom Huetius, who was acquainted with him, calls a very candid man, and who resided ten years in Syria, said, that when he approached the ruins of Tyre, and beheld the rocks stretched forth to the sea, and the great stones scattered up and down on the shore, made clean and smooth by the sun, the waves, and the winds, and of no use but for the drying of fishermen's nets, many of which happened to be at that time spread upon them, the prospect brought to his mind the prophecies of Ezekiel above-mentioned. This account has been confirmed by several travellers.

The fulfilment of prophecies concerning Egypt is also very remarkable. They corresponded to several successive periods of its history, and the last of them is completely verified in the present state of that once great and noble, but now enslaved and miserable country. After the desolation of that land, and
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the captivity of the people by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel prophesied (xxix. 14, 15.) that it should be A BASE KINGDOM. IT SHALL BE THE BASEST OF KINGDOMS, NEITHER SHALL IT EXALT ITSELF ANY MORE ABOVE THE NATIONS; FOR I WILL DIMINISH THEM, THAT THEY SHALL NO MORE RULE OVER THE NATIONS. xxx. 12, 13. I WILL SELL THE LAND INTO THE HAND OF THE WICKED, AND I WILL MAKE THE LAND WASTE, AND ALL THAT IS THEREIN, BY THE HAND OF STRANGERS; AND THERE SHALL BE NO MORE A PRINCE OF THE LAND OF EGYPT. From that time to the present, history shows that Egypt has never had a prince of its own; but notwithstanding its great natural advantages, has been successively under the power of different nations. Its present masters are the Turks and its state of slavery is most abject indeed. These are most extraordinary *shots*, and the *whimsical conceits of sectaries, expounders, and commentators* in applying them are, to be sure, very wonderful! But Mr. Paine does not read the bible, and perhaps did not know any thing of the prophecies except from the flights of his own imagination.

The Jews themselves also, though they hold Christians in the greatest detestation, are a strong, and standing proof of the truth of the Christian religion. By Daniel it was foretold that they would suffer soon after the cutting off of the Messiah, and in consequence of that event. And Moses foretold amongst other things, that THE LORD WOULD SCATTER THEM AMONG ALL PEOPLE, FROM ONE END OF THE EARTH UNTO THE OTHER. AND AMONG THOSE NATIONS SHALT THOU FIND NO EASE, NEITHER SHALL THE SOLE OF THY FOOT HAVE REST, BUT THE LORD SHALL GIVE THEE THERE A TREMBLING HEART, AND FAINTING OF EYES, AND SORROW OF MIND. Those who are acquainted with history will recollect various sufferings of the Jews since their dispersion, in consequence of their being regarded by every nation as aliens, who might be oppressed with impunity. And even at present, when the milder manners of the age prevent such gross acts of violence, notwithstanding the exertions of many liberal men in their favour, they are scattered abroad, without any fixed settlement, and are not allowed except it be in a few instances, to purchase lands, or to enjoy any of the privileges of subjects. It may, indeed,

indeed, be asserted, to be impossible to account satisfactorily for this state of the Jews, so very different from that of every other nation, without admitting the truth of the Jewish and Christian scriptures, in which, these remarkable events were so *distinctly* foretold; and strongly prejudiced must be the mind of that man, who can attribute these predictions to human sagacity, or can imagine any other foundation of them than the foreknowledge of that Being who made and directs all things.

I will now ask you, whether we may not justly consider these prophecies as great corroborations of the truth of the Jewish and Christian dispensations? and whether they are not to be ranked in a very different class from the oracles in the Heathen nations, and from those predictions of which we often hear so much in *these* days, which are either the result of human sagacity in discerning probable events at no great distance of time, or the effects of a heated imagination which may never be fulfilled in any degree, or perhaps interpretations of the ancient Jewish and Christian prophecies which remain to be fulfilled? To dignify such writings or expressions with the name of *prophecies* is exalting them to a rank which they seem to have no pretensions to.

LETTER XV.

On the evidence for Mahometanism.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

I PROPOSED lastly to consider whether there is evidence of a like nature, to prove that Mahomet was a prophet sent from God, or whether we are able to discover strong marks of imposture, and to perceive a material difference between the evidences of his religion, and that of Christ. My reason for noticing this is, because Mahomet laid claim to the character of a prophet, because the religion established by him has spread through a very great part of the world, and because Mr. Paine has thought fit to place him on a level with Moses and Christ. To enable you to form a judgment on the subject, I shall briefly mention the following particulars:

1. Mahomet

1. Mahomet did not found his pretensions upon *miracles* properly so called, that is upon proofs of supernatural agency capable of being known, and attested by others. Christians are warranted in this assertion by the Koran itself, which not only does not relate any miracles, but in a manner disclaims them, while it acknowledges them to have been wrought by Moses and Jesus. The visits of Gabriel, the night journey of Mahomet to heaven, and the delivery of the Koran, rest on the bare assertion of Mahomet, and deserve not the name of *sensible* miracles. This want of *attested miracles* is a great deficiency in the religion of Mahomet. It may be added, that though miracles have been attributed to Mahomet by his followers, there is no instance of it until more than a century after his death.

2. Mahomet was the grandson of the most powerful and honourable family in Mecca,* and though by circumstances, he did not inherit a fortune suitable to his birth, he had, long before the commencement of his mission, repaired this deficiency by an opulent marriage. A person of high descent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, would not fail, as a religious teacher, to attract attention and followers.

3. Mahomet conducted his design, at first especially, with great art and prudence. He first applied to and gained some of his own family, and a few persons of rank, making in all fourteen persons; this took up three years, during which all was transacted in secret. Afterwards, with the help of these friends, and under the powerful protection of his family, he began to preach publickly, and continued it for nine or ten years, and though there was no *established* religion to contend with, he made no very great number of proselytes.

4. Mahomet formed his scheme of religion so as to conciliate not only the Arabians, but also Jews, and Christians. He set out with the great doctrine of the strict and exclusive unity of God, and acknowledged the divine missions of Moses, and Christ, adding that he was sent to restore the truth which had been corrupted by their followers.

5. Two

* Mr. Paine has shown himself as ill informed respecting the history of Mahomet, as respecting the scriptures.—He speaks of Mahomet as one of *mean birth*.

5 Two purposes pervade the institution of Mahomet contained in the Koran, namely to make converts, and to make his converts soldiers. This is evident from his telling the Jews, Christians, and Pagan Arabs, that the religion which he taught, was no other than had been originally their own; from his never ceasing to describe the future anguish of unbelievers in terms calculated to inspire the greatest terror; from his voluptuous paradise, described in the most glowing colours, and suited to the passions of his followers; from his reserving the highest heaven for those who fought his battles, or expended their fortunes in his cause; and from his compliance with the passions of the people in warm regions, in indulging his followers with respect to women, whilst he restrained them from inebriating liquors, though, by the way, he did not venture to prohibit wine till the seventeenth year of his mission, when military successes had established his authority. These circumstances will easily account for his attracting many followers.

6. After these twelve years peaceable preaching in Mecca, with no remarkable success, he went to Medina, another city of Arabia. In this place were great disturbances occasioned by the mutual persecutions of Jews and Christians, and of the different Christian sects, added to the hereditary contentions of two hostile tribes. The religion of Mahomet presented a point of union, embracing the principles which were common to all, and met therefore with some success, though not very considerable, till a political association introduced Mahomet into Medina, and placed the government in his hands. From this time he discovered his views, and pretended to a commission to attack the infidels, to destroy idolatry, and to set up the true faith by the sword. He was victorious in many battles, his successors were so likewise, and Mahometanism became the prevailing religion of Asia.

7. Mahometanism never gained converts in consequence of an examination into the grounds of it, among persons not interested in the reception of it. In what country was this religion ever generally received, in which the ruling powers opposed it, and persecuted it, or in which the ruling powers were not previously Mahometans?

Other

Other circumstances might be mentioned, but I shall content myself with these, and shall leave it to yourselves to remark, how very different was the origin and progress of Christianity.*

LETTER XVI.

The Conclusion.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

I HAVE now finished the work I undertook. I have established, I hope to your satisfaction, that Jesus Christ was a person with divine authority; that this is proved to us by miracles and prophecy; and that the scriptures containing his doctrines deserve to be considered as the *word of God*. In doing this, I have endeavoured carefully to abstain from all those arguments which could have no weight except with Christians, and also to confine myself to the proof of those things which all Christians agree in believing, and on which they build those doctrines by which particular sects are distinguished. Should doubts still remain on the minds of any of you, be not discouraged, nor consider the subject as exhausted. These letters are only a compilation from the works of the many excellent writers to whom I have occasionally referred, and it is probable, notwithstanding the corrections of kind friends, not only that there are many defects in the style and method which might have been rectified, but what is of more consequence, that some arguments have been omitted, and others weakened by ill-timed abbreviation: but their speedy publication appeared to be an object of the greatest importance. The same motive which has induced me to publish these letters, will also lead me to remove any difficulties which may occur to a sincere enquirer after truth, as far as lies in my power, and I make no doubt that there are many others who, on being applied to, will be found equally willing.

The

* Paley's evidences of Christianity, vol. 3, and Priestley's letters to a philosophical unbeliever, vol. 2, letter 11.

The immoral lives, and bitter dissensions of Christians, have been often brought as an argument against Christianity ; this is a very unfair argument, but however let me entreat you to take away this reproach. Show by your behaviour, that whatever be your speculative opinions, you consider real practical goodness of heart and life, as the one thing needful, and the only means of obtaining the favour of God here, and eternal happiness hereafter. Above all let me exhort you, as children of the same Almighty Father, who is the author of all the good we enjoy, as followers of Jesus our common master, whom we all profess to love and reverence ; and as persons travelling the same great road to glory, honour and immortality—to cultivate love one for another, to put away from you all religious animosities, and to show yourselves Christians, not in outward profession only, but in deed and in truth, acting according to the precepts of Christ. Wishing you all happiness both for time, and for eternity,

I am, &c.

T. D. HINCKS.

THE END.

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